

# Losing a family member: grieving process

## Abstract

A person is born, lives and dies. This is a natural process, and every person experiences it. Death is a part of the life cycle and an inevitable painful fact that exists in the lives of all humans. Every person encounters death at some stage of his/her life. Every death has an effect on a person's life. But the death of a person we know affects us more than any death we see on the news or read about in the newspaper. The death and disappearance of a person we know, who is from our family, affects us badly in psychological, emotional, physical and many other ways. In this paper, we will examine the concept of death and losing someone we know, a family member and its effects on people.

**Keywords:** Death, losing someone, grief, psychological support.

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## Introduction

Death is an integral part of human life. Every individual will face death at any time of his/her life. All of us will lose our loved ones. This is a normal process in the cycle of life. There is nothing a person can do in the face of death, except accept it. Death is very painful at the very beginning, and a person thinks that she/he cannot handle this situation. Getting psychological support at this point of the pain is a very important factor for a person to return to his/her old life and recover from his/her pain as soon as possible. Some people receive therapy when they lose a loved one, while others refuse it and think that returning to their old lives or being happy again is a betrayal of those they have lost. The situation of refusing therapy leads them to a great depression, and they will neither be happy themselves nor be able to make the people around them happy. Sometimes our friends become more intimate to us than our family, and we value them more than our family. Especially in youth and early adulthood, friends occupy the most important place in a person's life. We talk and share with our friends all our secrets, despairs and delights. In this case, even if it is not from the family, losing a friend we love very much or someone we know can also cause us a great deal of pain. In such situations, it is also necessary to seek psychological support. Otherwise, it is quite difficult for a person to return to his/her former life. On the other hand, another point that we will address in this research article is the grieving process after losing a loved one. Mourning is a natural process that we go through after losing a loved one. And the way each person grieves is different. Some of them, which includes the vast majority of mourners, completely isolate themselves from social life. On the other hand, some people, in contrast to isolation, involve themselves more in social life and do activities that require taking risks or which they would not do before. Depending on the social environment and the state of upbringing, some people direct themselves more to religion, while another part try to stay away from their thoughts by giving themselves to alcohol, drugs or any kind of intoxicating substance.

## Losing someone

Death affects people very much in any case, but if it happens suddenly at an unexpected moment, it will be much more difficult to get through the process, since there will be a shock effect besides the pain. Family members are often unable to accept the fact that their loved ones have died as the death were immediate, sudden, or occurred within a very short period of time, and the last time the family saw the deceased was when he or she was still alive and healthy.<sup>1</sup> I want to give an example from my own life for specifically this topic. Last year, one

morning my uncle had a heart attack and he died. Before that he had no illness, and he was middle aged. So this was very unexpected and shocking news for his family. After this sudden loss it was so hard for their family to go back to their ex-lives. They were devastated. It took them almost half a year to be able to talk about him without crying. On the other hand, we lost my grandfather almost a year later. He was sick and very old. His death was sad but not as devastated as an unexpected death. So regarding these real life examples, unexpected and sudden deaths are more devastating. When a person loses someone, all the things that s/he wanted to live with that person and cannot live with anymore remain a regret to him/her. And unfortunately, individuals start to blame themselves. By not paying enough attention to the deceased, not being able to make him/her happy or proud enough when s/he was alive, and many other things. Sometimes they wish they were at the place of the deceased. Unfortunately, these feelings or regrets that are felt are of no use to the person himself/herself. People who lose their loved ones to sudden death seek counseling frequently for they feel stuck in their grief. They believe that they have not been able to overcome the grief, that the mourning is not coming to an end, and that they need to get through it and get back to living their lives.<sup>1</sup>

## The effects of death

Although death is a well-known fact, losing someone we love can cause us unexpected pain. The grieving process works differently for each person, we will talk about this at later stages. Currently, in this section of the research paper, we will talk about the effects of death on people. The pain of losing a person we love is different for everyone. Also, the effects of death on each person is different. Situations such as the degree to which people will be affected by death and how they will react to it are affected by their personalities and life experiences. Of course, it is impossible to make an assumption for this situation, as any personality characteristic is affected in this way by the death of the person they love. If we go back to the moment when the news of a family member's death was received, not everyone can react the same way even at that moment. Attitudes towards death are evaluated in the literature under the headings of desire for immortality, denial of death, defiance of death, asking for death, accepting death and mourning.<sup>2</sup> According to the results of a study conducted with people who have lost one of their families, some people reacted to the news of an unexpected death by crying. Some did not accept the news of their death and believed that the deceased person was still waiting for them at their home. Some people found themselves guilty of the death of their relatives and believed that if they had been more careful, these people would still be alive. In the face of death, some people may experience confusion in their role in life. For example, as a result of

the research, many people have not been able to do their jobs properly or streamline their social lives as they used to after losing a loved one. On the other hand, the inability of people to do their work in order is one of the long-term effects of death on a person. Some of them, in addition to accepting the death of their loved ones, have always tried to find a piece of them in their daily lives and have constantly revealed the memories that have passed with them. For example, when talking to friends at work or school, they constantly brought up the topic of deceased relatives and what s/he said. Some people understand that death is unavoidable and get through the grieving process, they begin to be more positive and forgiving both to themselves and to those around them. They focus on improving themselves. And on the other hand, some of them believed that death was a reminder for us humans and that we should learn from it and connect more to our remaining family and friends. The examples we mentioned above are only some of the long-term and short-term consequences of death on our lives. It would be an unnecessary act to try to restrict all the effects of death with the above examples. Considering that even a simple event does not have the same effect on people, we cannot expect the effects of death to be limited.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, as we can all imagine, people's reactions to death vary depending on their age. Children begin to be interested in death at an early age, but the concept of death is more blurred and vague than adults.<sup>3</sup> Children can't make sense of the chaos around them. Everyone says that someone has died, but they don't know what it means to die. If the deceased is a close person to them, they may even ask when s/he will be back. The thought of death is very common in adolescence, but the interest in death and the challenge of death occur together.<sup>2</sup> It seems terrible for an adolescent to get old more than to die.<sup>4</sup> As people get older, the fear of death begins. Because everyone knows that they are approaching death step by step. Gradually, they lose their former vigor, diseases begin, and individuals, unfortunately, realize that they are about to get old. Studies have shown that those who are in middle age have a higher death anxiety.<sup>5</sup> By the time we reach old age, the elderly have many observations and experiences related to death. The fact that they think more about death and talk more shows that older people live intertwined with the fact of death. Apart from the elderly who do not accept death during this period, the elderly in general do not have too much fear of death.<sup>2</sup>

## Grieving

We can give the definition of grief as "a natural human response to separation, bereavement describ[ing] an individual's personal response to loss and [having] emotional, physical, behavioral, cognitive, social and spiritual dimensions".<sup>6</sup> In this conceptualization of grief, emotional reactions are not the only ways in which grief can manifest itself; they can also present in the form of cognitive, spiritual, social, or action-oriented reactions.<sup>7,8</sup> Bereavement is a natural reaction that develops after loss. It is a difficult and stressful process, but it is not a disease. The mourning process is an individual and peculiar process.<sup>9</sup> People have a great emotional breakdown after losing someone they love, and it can take a long time for them to recover from this devastation. But this process proceeds not only emotionally. People sometimes have problems with their personalities and cognitive processes. For example, there are many people who begin to have hallucinations during the mourning process and see the deceased person and talk to him/her. In addition, sleep problems are also part of this grieving process and can also go both ways. Some people completely forbid themselves to sleep and experience insomnia, while others confuse real life with dreams due to oversleeping. The grieving process is a painful one. But in a way, a person needs this process to return to his/

her old life, to be better. After a certain time, this might be up to one year, it is necessary to get through this process. Some people do not manage to get through the grieving process, and this leads them to a number of permanent illnesses. The grieving process leads some people to depression. In such cases, when a person cannot get over the grief on their own, they need to get external support. Going to therapy and getting psychological support helps a lot under these circumstances.

## Getting Psychological Support

A retrospective cross-sectional survey design was employed, using the VOICES(SF) questionnaire and multiple methods for data analyses. The sample consisted of 485 bereaved family members (aged: 20–90years old, 70% women) of people who died in hospital between August 2016-April 2017. According to this study being a family member of a person with advanced illness can have a multidimensional impact: psychological, with increased stress and worry; physical, due to various —at times burdensome— practical care activities; social, involving limitations on social life; and financial, having to take time off work to be a caregiver and/or the absence of income for the ill person.<sup>10</sup> As we have seen in some of the results of the sample study given above, when a person from the family dies, this can have many effects on a person. In addition, if the deceased person has illness before dying, this condition can have bad effects on the family both psychologically and physically. In the same way, as we mentioned in this study when death is sudden and unexpected, it has a big shock effect on the family, and this slows down the process of recovery and return to the old life of the person. For this and many other reasons, a person sometimes cannot get over the grief and is trapped in a great pessimism. For this reason, getting psychological support and striving to heal is the right move to make. These therapies are sometimes done individually and sometimes as a group. They both have their positive sides separately. Popular media and outdated grief theory can further perpetuate the misconception that grieving is a step-by-step process that one can "get over" in time, and that thoughts about the deceased become obsolete or unnatural after a certain point.<sup>6,11,12</sup> Because the grief is a step by step process the most correct move for people with such conditions is to start individual therapy at the initial stage. After individual therapy, when the person recovers a little, it is a more logical step to switch the individual therapy to group therapy. Because it can be difficult for a person to witness other people's suffering during a period of time that he/she has not yet been able to get over his/her own pain. On the other hand, when people go to group therapy after individual therapy, they see that they are not alone in life and that there are other people who have similar pains and life conditions with them and they feel relieved. What people most suffer in life is generally loneliness so it is important that they feel there are others who understand them. Also they feel safer when other people in the group therapy understand and answer their pain, when they share their story, what the deceased one meant for them, how was their relationship and how hard it is to get used to living without them.

On the other hand, in some cases therapy works before death. When a person in a family is sick and soon to be dead it is important for the other members to get support to be prepared for death. Of course death is not something that we could be prepared for but at least by therapy we can lower the shock effect of death. So, we can say that it is more damageable to lose someone and not be ready for it. From another point of view, it does not matter how much support we get, losing a loved one will be devastating. So, it is needed to have someone we can talk to when we are going through hard times.

In another point of view, we, as human beings, need therapy in every step of our lives. Maybe not like psychological support but we need someone to talk to about our problems or anything going on in our lives. Therapy in a sense is the safe place where we can talk about everything going on inside us, in life, our emotions and thoughts without hesitation. In some cultures, people feel like “if I go to a psychologist people might think I am crazy.” but indeed that is not true. People are always in need of talking to someone. It makes them look at themselves from outside, from a different perspective. Also a professional look into our lives and a wise person leading us to what we need to see about ourselves may help us make better decisions in life.

## Cultural Differences

People experience death and grief in different ways in every culture. The way they look at life and the way they perceive it is different from each other. The differences between our way of looking in life causes from the environment and the family that we grow into. These differences may cause differences in the way that we interpret our pain. And also the differences between cultures cause people to feel under pressure so they might not behave the way they want to. If we need to give examples, in some cultures when we lose someone it is needed to cry out loud. On the other hand, in some cultures crying out loud is perceived as disrespectful to the deceased. So that people hold their tears and this might cause them to get depressed or have an emotional explosion. As another example, in some cultures men can not cry. Crying is thought to be an emotion for only women. Men should always be strong and should not show their emotions. So, after a loss men feel under pressure, between expressing their emotions and crying and not falling out of society’s eye. When people delay their emotions it causes bigger problems in the future. They cannot focus on their life, they feel depressed all the time.

## Conclusion

To sum up, in this paper we talked about losing a family member or a loved one and its effects on us, on our lives. When we lose someone we love, our lives turn upside down. We can not think, behave or live properly. Of course after a period of time we get used to it like everything else. At least it doesn’t hurt that much. When we have just lost someone, the lack of that person hurts us a lot. But as time goes on, this situation does not give us so much pain or shock. The absence of that person is now customary. We wake up one morning and we don’t even remember that person is not with us. Or we don’t think that every time the door knocks, the deceased will come. Death is a situation that we will all face and get used to sooner or later. Any pain or any happiness lasts a life term. On the other hand, there are times that we might feel under the air and it is completely fine. Indeed, losing someone is never easy. It is hard to not see people anymore who we saw all the time in the past. However death is a part of our lives so there is nothing to do except accept death. Also, in this paper we talked about the grieving process. The death of a significant person in one’s life forces individuals to engage in a number of grief-related tasks, including reconstructing a narrative about the relationship, resituating

their relationship with the deceased individual, and developing a new sense of self post-loss.<sup>13</sup> We also talked about psychological support that was taken by bereaved people who lost someone that they love. According to the research that was done with the family members of a deceased person, going to therapy after losing someone helped them to feel better and recover from their pain more easily. As the last topic, we talked about cultural differences and the way people perceive death. Death is just an inevitable end that will happen to everyone. But it brings with it a lot of different things. Each culture perceives death differently, and therefore, when they encounter it, they follow different paths.

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## Conflict interest

The authors declared no have conflict interest for the study.

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