Supporting young people who have been parentally bereaved: Can physical activity help and what services are available?

The BABYSTEPS project

Jane Williams, Julia Fruer, Angel M Chater
University of Bedfordshire, Bedford, UK

Gillian W Shorter, Ulster University, UK

Neil Howlett, University of Hertfordshire, UK
The importance of this research

In 2016 in the UK:

- 23,600 parents died
- Leaving 41,000 dependent children
- Every 22 minutes a parent dies

1 in 29 children have been bereaved of a parent or sibling.
Roughly 1 per classroom.

(Child Bereavement Network, 2016; Child Bereavement, 2017)
Grief outcomes differ in nature and severity.

Affective:
- Guilt
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression

Cognitive:
- Resilience
- Concentration
- Suicide ideation
- Well-being

Behavioural:
- Substance use
- Isolation
- Suicide
- Aggression

Post traumatic growth
Post traumatic stress

Well-being
Physical activity and related grief outcomes

Physical activity has been shown to be beneficial for improving mental health and well-being (Hamer et al., 2009).

Decrease depression
Decrease anxiety
Improve self-esteem

Helps control aggression
Helps with isolation
Improves quality of life

(Bailey, 2006; Clough et al., 2016; Eime et al., 2013; Fox, 1999; Ströhle, 2009)
RQ: Can physical activity support bereavement?: A systematic review of the literature

Aim: To examine if sport and physical activity can support grief outcomes of bereaved individuals.

Inclusion criteria:
- Any age
- Any gender
- Personal bereavement
- PA use to support
- Grief outcomes measured

Exclusion criteria:
- National grief (e.g. 9/11)
- Sporting injury + loss of activity
- PA used prolong life + linked to mortality

Year of search - 2019
Records identified through database searching (n = 829)

- Additional records identified through other sources (n = 2)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 606)

Records screened (n = 606)

Records excluded (n = 567)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 39)

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 20)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 19)
- Investigating physical functioning not physical activity (n = 1)
- Physical activity not used (n = 11)
- Cancer survivors using physical activity and experiencing bereavement but no relationship (n = 1)
- No bereavement (n = 2)
- Conference abstract or review (n = 2)
Results: Studies included

- **Parental Deaths**
  - Brewer and Sparkes (2011a)
  - Brewer and Sparkes (2011b)
  - McClatchey et al., (2009)
  - McClatchey et al., (2012)
  - Zhao et al., (2014)

- **Patient Deaths**
  - Granek et al., (2017)
  - Granek et al., (2016a)
  - Granek et al., (2016b)
  - Moores et al., (2007)

- **Spousal Death**
  - Grimby et al., (2008)
  - Kang and Yoo (2007)
  - Richardson (2010)
  - Moores et al., (2007)

- **Still-Birth**
  - Huberty et al., (2014a)
  - Huberty et al., (2014b)

- **Multiple bereavement**
  - Simpson et al., (2014)
  - Li et al., (2015)

- **Later Life bereavement**
  - Chen et al., (2005)

- **General bereavement**
  - Phoenix and Orr (2017)

- **Caregiver bereavement**
  - Zhang et al., (2008)

- **Residential weekends**
- **Martial arts or Yoga**
- **Dan Jeon breathing and stretching**
- **Running or Walking**
- **Non- Specified**
Parental bereavement studies: Grief outcomes identified

- Builds Resilience's
- Improves self-esteem
- Decreases loneliness
- Meeting others in similar situations
- Distraction
- Freedom
- Retaining Memories
- Family cohesion
Systematic review: Conclusions

- There is limited research investigating parental bereavement and physical activity

- Variety of activities - non-specified activity or residential weekends.

- Qualitative research with small sample sizes

- Lack of interventions in this area

- No standardized way of measuring grief outcomes
What support is available for bereavement?

**National and Local Bereavement Services**

- Child Bereavement UK
- Cruse

**Types of Services provided**

- Individual counselling
- Group counselling
Aim and Methods: Study 2

**Aim:**
To reveal what current physical activity provisions are in place for young people who have been bereaved.
How many young people access bereavement support services.

**Method:**

- Bereavement organisations (10-24yrs)
- Completed an online survey
- Contacted via email + phone
- Websites search for information
Participating organisations

373 Bereavement organisations identified

- 167 Participated
- 206 did not participate

Reasons for non-participation

- Not successfully contacted.
- Declined to participate
- Adult services, no young people
  - No physical activity
Physical activity offered to support bereavement in young people.

- **Yes**: 16.8% (n=28)
- **No**: 80.8% (n=135)
- **Not Answered**: 2.4% (N=4)
Current Provisions: Results

The types of physical activity offered by bereavement services.
Number of young people who accessed bereavement organisations

- Unknown: 59
- Referral: 5334
- Approximate: 105300
- Accurate: 8258
Current Provisions: Conclusions

- 83.8% of organisations don’t offer physical activity
- Residential weekend is the most offered type of activity
- Many organisations do not know how many people use their services.
Overall conclusions

- Systematic review highlights the limited research
- Studies fail to mention which physical activity is used.
- Majority of services do not offer physical activity
- Organisations do not know how many young people access their services
- Mainly annual physical activities offered.

- More research with target population
- Can physical activity support parental bereavement?
- More interventions with proper evaluation
Future directions: the BABY STEPS project

Belonging
After Bereavement in the Young

Support Through Exercise Physical activity and Sport

Can physical activity support parentally bereaved young people?

• Mixed methods evaluation to co-create an evidence informed intervention

Thank you

With thanks to ISPAR (funding), Dr Angel Chater (PI), Dr Gillian Shorter, Dr Neil Howlett, Dr Julia Fruer