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The ripples of death: exploring the bereavement experiences and mental health of young men in custody

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ABSTRACT:
The study explored the prevalence and nature of bereavement among 33 young men who had been sentenced to a Young Offenders Institution. A bereavement had been experienced by 91% of the sample, and the rates of traumatic and multiple deaths were high. Young men who had experienced more 'difficult' bereavements scored higher on the mental health screen than those who had not, although differences did not reach statistical significance. Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with a sub-sample in order to describe young men's bereavement experiences from their own perspective, and these findings were aligned to a theory of grief processing. The implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: bereavement; loss; youth justice; young offenders

INTRODUCTION

Bereavement is an inevitable part of life, and a bereavement experience forms a common feature of many childhoods, with prevalence of up to 90% recorded by school-leaving age if family pets are included (Ens and Bond, 2005). Studies that focus solely on family and friends find a bereavement rate among UK schoolchildren of between 43% (Highet and Jamieson, 2007) and 78% (Harrison and Harrington, 2001). Parental death is consistently found to occur in about 3-5% of the general adolescent population (Ens and Bond, 2005; Harrison and Harrington, 2001; Highet and Jamieson, 2007; Parsons, 2011).

Learning how to cope with bereavement is therefore an important life skill for young people and adults alike. Worden's (1983) theory of bereavement processing outlines four basic tasks that must be accomplished in order to adapt to the loss: acceptance; working through the pain of grief; adjusting to the new environment without the deceased and, lastly, forming a new and appropriate bond with the deceased that allows the bereaved to move on with their life and reinvest their emotions. While these tasks do not have to be completed in a specific sequence, some logical order is present, for example, the loss has to be accepted before the emotions can be addressed. These tasks of mourning equally apply to bereaved children and young people but the ability to undertake each task is affected by age and developmental stage (Worden, 1996). The interaction between the mourning process and child development, and how well this is managed, is therefore an important factor in whether children and young people successfully adapt to loss as "it is essential that the grieving person accomplish these tasks before mourning can be completed" (Worden 1983:p10). Incomplete grief tasks can cause complicated or unresolved grief (Shear and Shair, 2005; Worden, 1983) which occurs when normal grief symptoms become acute and persistent and begin to interfere with functioning (Julian, 2008). Complicated grief can result in physical symptoms such as raised blood pressure and heart problems and is also linked to higher levels of suicidal ideation, increased risk of depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Kristjanson et al, 2006).

Bereavement Among Young Offenders

It has been found that young people involved in offending display higher rates of certain types of bereavements than the general adolescent population (Vaswani, 2008; Youth Justice Trust, 2003). In a study of young persistent offenders, Vaswani (2008) found that while 59% had suffered a bereavement, well within the range found in the general population, the rate of parental death far exceeded that which would be expected, at 41%. Multiple deaths and traumatic deaths such as murder and suicide also occurred at a higher frequency than in the general population. Similar findings were identified in a sample of male offenders in a Young Offenders Institution, where 40% had lost a parent and traumatic deaths were common (Finlay and Jones, 2000). The nature of this association is not clear. Finlay and Jones (2000: p569) assert that "severe emotional stressors, particularly traumatic bereavements, in childhood or adolescence are linked to offending and maladaptive behaviour" and it may be that experiencing a bereavement means that young people become less resilient and more vulnerable to negative outcomes (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2008). Certainly many young people self-report that bereavement was a precipitating factor in their offending behaviour (Barnardo's, 2008).

However, the Childhood Bereavement Network (2008) has also identified that many of the factors associated with offending are the same as for premature death i.e. family conflict, poor housing, availability of drugs and weapons. Regardless of the nature of the relationship, it is clear that young people living in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to experience serious or multiple losses (Ribbens McCarthy, 2005).

The high rates of trauma and multiple bereavements in young offenders are concerning for a variety of reasons. Studies have suggested that traumatic deaths result in a more complicated bereavement response (Dowdney, 2000; Kristjanson et al, 2006; Pfeffer et al.,1997) and comorbidity is common (Dowdney, 2000). Harrison and Harrington (2001) found that multiple bereavements caused a significant risk of depression in adolescents, with those who had experienced four or more losses at a much higher risk than those who had never experienced a loss. Similarly Ribbens McCarthy (2005) reports that multiple bereavements alongside other issues cause more negative outcomes in areas such as education, depression, self-esteem and risk-taking behaviour.

Bereavement In The Prison Setting

Given the association between early experiences of bereavement, loss and trauma and antisocial behaviour and other negative outcomes, it is perhaps unsurprising that Schetky (1998) reports that bereavement is prevalent among people in custody. Prisoners may be affected by earlier bereavements or may have to process the death of a loved one while in prison. However, the prison setting makes dealing with bereavement all the more complicated as prison interferes with each of Worden's four stages of grief processing (Hendry, 2009). Acceptance may be difficult, especially when there is not the opportunity to say goodbye and assimilate a physical image of death (Potter, 1999). Prison can be a harsh environment in which there is limited opportunity to express and work through emotions, with the added complexities of guilt and self-blame common among the prison population (Hendry, 2009; Potter, 1999). The physical separation already imposed by custody can make it more difficult for the bereaved to adjust to the new roles required following a death (Hendry, 2009; Potter, 1999; Schetky, 1998). The fourth task of reinvesting and developing new bonds is the most difficult to achieve while in custody, with a great gulf separating the prison environment from 'normal' life experiences and opportunities to move on (Hendry, 2009; Potter, 1999; Schetky, 1998; Worden, 1983).

With custody contributing to incomplete grief processing, the rate of complicated grief is likely to be higher in prison than in the general population. Unresolved grief is of concern to everyone: not only can it cause the prison significant challenges in managing behaviour, it may make reintegration back in to the community more difficult to accomplish and ultimately may have an impact on reoffending rates (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2008; Young-Junior, 2003). The stability and containment that custody can provide may also offer a crucial opportunity to address any bereavement issues before the return to the community (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2008).

Despite the clear association between bereavement, offending and custody there has been very little research conducted into bereavement in the prison context (Hendry, 2009; Schetky, 1998). Knowledge and

understanding of males' experiences is also limited as men are underrepresented in bereavement research (Mitchell et al., 2004). Ribbens McCarthy (2005) notes a dearth of research that examines the pasts of troubled young people to establish whether they contain a higher incidence of bereavement. Furthermore there is a need for more qualitative research (Fauth, Thompson & Penny, 2009) and for developing our understanding of young people's bereavements as "very little research has asked young people themselves to voice their own experiences" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005:p2).

This paper aims to address these limitations in the evidence-base by assessing the extent and nature of bereavements among young men in a Young Offenders Institution and by identifying any potential relationship between bereavement experiences and mental health symptoms. In addition the paper will draw extensively on the young men's thoughts and views about their bereavements to enhance our understanding of their experiences, particularly within the context of the prison setting. The implications for practice will then be discussed.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Young men from the Local Authority area in study who had been sentenced to at least six months custody at a Young Offenders Institution were eligible to participate. Young people with a potential release date within two weeks of involvement in the research were excluded from participating in order to allow time for any issues or concerns arising from involvement in the research to be identified. The final target population included 81 young males.

A total sample of 33 young men (41%) completed the bereavement survey, with a mean age of 19.3 years (range 17.0 to 20.9 years). Of that sample, 31 young men had a full mental health screen and could therefore also be included in that aspect of the research. The mean age of that sample was also 19.3 years (range 17.0 to 20.9 years). A purposive sample of young men with experience of bereavement was selected for further interview and eleven young men from the original sample participated in the in-depth interviews (33%). The mean age of interview participants was 19.6 years (range 18.6 to 20.8 years).

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the Social Research Association ethical guidelines and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the research and all data was stored securely. Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participant and conducted in private. Transcripts were stored securely and anonymously, and the recording destroyed upon transcription.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research all participants were provided with information about where they could seek support inside the prison and also how to access the Samaritan's helpline from inside the prison. Any information provided in the research that caused concern regarding serious and imminent

harm to self or others was immediately flagged with the prison and participants were advised of this prior to completing the survey. Staff from Chaplaincy were on hand to deal with any emerging issues and to make appropriate onward referrals to relevant agencies as necessary.

Measures

1. Bereavement Type

Bereavements were identified by self-report from the participants and were coded as 'substantial' (four or more); 'recent' (within the previous 12 months); traumatic (caused by overdose, accident, murder or suicide, regardless of the participant's *experience* of that bereavement) and parental (where the death was a biological parent, step-parent or main carer as defined by the participant). In addition an age cut-off was applied at age 11 (approximately representing the age at transition to secondary school).

2. Indicators of Mental Health

The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument Version 2 (MAYSI-2) was used to provide an indication of the mental health needs of the participants (Grisso and Barnum, 2006). The MAYSI-2 is a 52-item self-report inventory designed to identify young people aged under 18 with mental health needs. The MAYSI-2 is *not* a diagnostic tool and is not designed to produce an overall score, but items contribute to a score on one of seven independent scales: alcohol / drug use; angry-irritable; depressed-anxious; somatic complaints; suicide ideation; thought disturbance and traumatic experiences. On a cautionary note, it should be highlighted the screen has not been normed outside of the US juvenile justice system, nor on young people aged over 18. The intention of this research was to analyse the MAYSIs for under 18s and over 18s separately to identify any issues arising from the application of the tool with this demographic. This did not prove to be feasible given the sample size of under 18s generated. As such, the overall 'tally' of scores should be interpreted carefully and only viewed as a general indicator of the level of mental health needs.

3. Bereavement Experiences

Bereavement experiences were gathered in detail from the young men using an interpretive phenomenological approach. This analytical framework focuses the research around how people make sense of their major life experiences, and is concerned with "exploring experience in its own terms" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009:p1).

Procedure

All young men were initially approached by staff from the prison Chaplaincy to raise awareness of the research. Potential participants were advised of the purpose of the research, and it was stressed that it was not necessary to have experienced a bereavement to participate in the initial survey. Young men were encouraged to participate by the provision of snacks, time out from normal duties and the availability of leisure activities while waiting to participate.

Young men who consented to being involved in the survey stage of the research could opt in or out of the interview stage. Interviews were undertaken on a separate date from the surveys and took place in a

private interview room. Interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 15 and 70 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Analysis

Survey data and MAYSI-2 results were analysed using SPSS Statistics 20 (IBM Corp, 2011). A Mann-Whitney U statistical test was used to explore the differences between bereavement types and the MAYSI-2. Interview transcripts were analysed individually and manually coded through three coding cycles. A cross-case analysis was then undertaken to further identify emergent themes across the sample.

RESULTS

Prevalence and Nature of Bereavement

A total of 30 out of the 33 young men who participated in the survey had experienced a bereavement (91%). Among those who had been bereaved a total of 162 bereavements had been experienced and the mean number of bereavements experienced was 5.4, ranging from one bereavement to 18 (see Figure 1). Of those who had been bereaved, only one young man had *not* experienced more than one bereavement. Figure 2 outlines the nature of the young men's bereavement experiences. Both traumatic and multiple bereavements feature regularly, with more than three-quarters of individuals experiencing at least one traumatic bereavement, and two-thirds of individuals experiencing four or more bereavements in total.

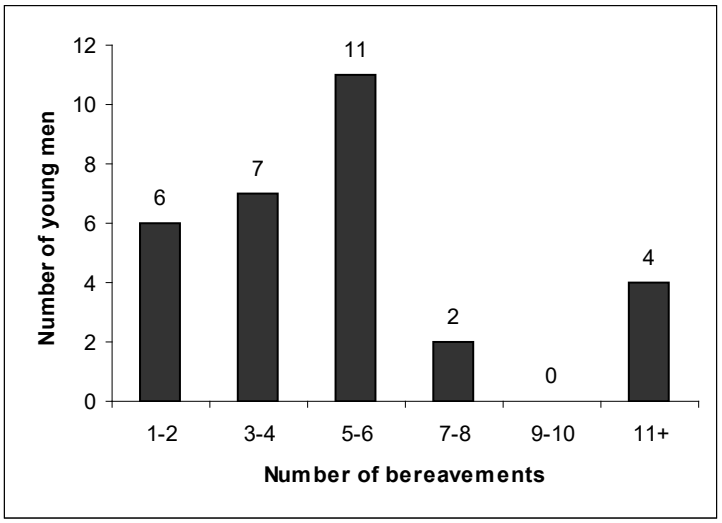

Figure 1: Number of bereavement experiences (*n=30*)

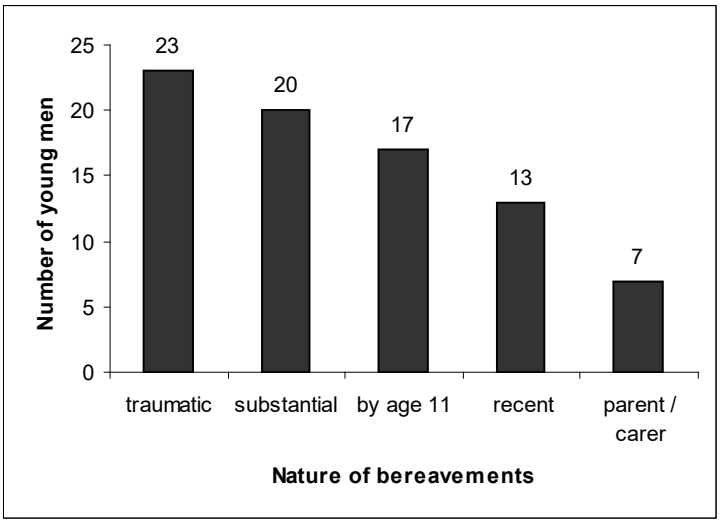

Figure 2: Nature of bereavement experiences (*n=30*)

Relationship Between Bereavement And Mental Health Needs (MAYSI-2)

1. Bereaved compared to non-bereaved

The dataset used was the 31 young people who had a full and accurate MAYSI-2 screen. However, as only two young men in this sample had not been bereaved, it was not possible to conduct statistical comparisons between the two groups due to the lack of sufficient power. Despite this, a simple eyeball of the data revealed some potential differences that might be worth exploring in a larger-scale study, as comparison of the median MAYSI-2 tally of scores did suggest that the bereaved scored 10 points higher than non-bereaved.

2. Comparing the different bereavement 'types'

The dataset used was all bereaved young people who had completed a full MAYSI-2 (a total sample of 29). Those who had experienced a recent bereavement scored highest on the MAYSI-2. In every category of bereavement, young people who had experienced the potentially more 'difficult' bereavement-type scored higher on average on the MAYSI-2 than those that had not, with the exception of the loss of a parent / main carer. This appeared particularly marked in the case of traumatic bereavements (the median score differing by six points in this instance). However, a Mann-Whitney U test did not reveal these differences to be statistically significant, potentially as a result of the small and uneven samples sizes limiting the power of the test. The statistical findings have therefore not been reported here, but potentially provide an important theme for further larger-scale research.

THE YOUNG MEN'S EXPERIENCES

The interviews with young men explored all bereavements, including those that occurred prior to their entering custody, and provided insight in to their bereavement experiences. These have been aligned to Worden's (1983) model to provide understanding about how these young men are working through the tasks of grief.

Accepting The Loss

The distance that prison creates between the young men and their loved ones meant that young men were forced to contemplate losses before they had even happened. Anxiety about death was at the forefront of the young men's minds and one of their main worries was that something would happen to someone they loved while they were in prison, even if there were no immediate concerns about someone's health. In addition, the simple fact of being in prison meant that many of the young men were carrying feelings of guilt and self-blame. Young men felt that they had much to apologise for and wished to have the opportunity to clear the air before loved ones passed away. The shame, stigma and practicalities of being in prison, however, added an extra layer of complexity to their ability to achieve this:

> "I just hope she can hold on for another 10 months so I can get out of here and see her at least for one last time […] She doesnae even know where I am, she thinks I'm doon in England working"

> "see when you're daein' a long sentence like mine you cannae help but worry that something's gonna happen and you're not gonna be there to look after yer ma or whoever"

When a bereavement did occur many of the young men talked about being in shock and described the unfolding situation as an unreal experience, often referring to bereavement as a life event that they had thought only happened to other people or in the media.

> "you see it in the news and you think that's never gonna happen and it ends up happening and it hits home, it's hard"

The practicalities of prison life meant that it was not always a straightforward process to accept the death of a loved one:

> "I've got a couple of friends that I've no really grieved for yet. Because I've been away and had that detachment then I think it's made it easier because I've no been face-to-face but I think that with being so detached comes a kind of numbness, that you know you're not really connected to reality and I don't know how it will affect me when it comes time that I need to face common friends or see their family or visit their graves"

Saying goodbye before the person passed away was important to all of the young men. Funeral attendance also offered an important opportunity for all of the young men to pay their respects and marked an important point in beginning to accept the finality of the situation:

> "I think that's when I really started to understand kinda that this was it, it's done"

Custody obviously has a marked impact on the ability of the young men to participate in funerals. Young men understood why the rules were in place but expressed the view that funeral attendance should be made available for more than just the immediate family. Young men frequently portrayed large yet close-knit extended family networks, with aunts, uncles, cousins and wider family members playing important roles in their upbringings. In addition the requirement to attend funerals in handcuffs was seen as deeply embarrassing. All felt it conveyed a lack of respect to the deceased and many felt it would make attending a funeral very difficult. None of the young men, however, had thus far attended a funeral under these circumstances.

> "I wouldn't like to go cos it's embarrassing going in cuffs and all that, that's the highest thing of disrespect in my book. Going to somebody's end of life, going to somebody's funeral with handcuffs? Nah. It's disrespectful. I'd never do it. […] I don't know if I'd regret it or no but in my mind that's the decision I would make so I'd need to live with it."

Working Through The Pain Of Grief

Sadness was the predominant response to bereavement, and recognised by many of the young men as a normal and expected emotion following a death. Sadness also appeared to be an enduring emotion, and was prevalent regardless of the length of time that had passed since the bereavement. Indeed many young men felt certain that the feelings of sadness would never disappear.

> "I still feel sad…I think you always, I don't think you lose the feeling of being sad, I mean when you lose someone"

However a bereavement could trigger a huge range of emotions and responses, including excessive rumination, sleep problems, guilt, crying, and loss of interest in things. Concern for other people affected by the loss was widespread.

> "Um, I was quite upset, but I was more upset that my Mum was upset about it, you know?"

> "I did have thoughts when she died 'I shouldnae have done this' and 'I should have done this'"

Anger was a common response particularly in situations where the death was perceived as needless, or a waste of life. A young man's perception of war, for example, coloured his experience of the loss of friends in combat. Others were angry at the deceased for leaving them, or at others for not stopping the death from happening. In instances where murder had been committed the grief responses were sometimes complicated because the young men often knew the perpetrator of the crime.

> "it was just anger, anger at the whole situation […] There was no reason for him to be there, there was no reason for him to be shot and why die in a war over nothing. It was a waste of life."
> "I felt angry at the guy that killed him…for a long time, I know who it was, I've came across them a few times…not long after I came across him and all I thought was 'revenge"

However, it was clear from the young men's responses that bereavements varied considerably in the level of pain that they inflicted, and this could not be ascertained simply by the relationship with the deceased. The loss of a father who was not well known had less of an impact than the death of a friend or aunt that the young man saw regularly. The loss of a much-loved grandparent who had led a long and happy life was at times easier to bear than the untimely or unnecessary death of a mere acquaintance:

> "it's different with your friends to family know what I mean? I think losing family is in a different league"

> "it's hard to grieve for somebody that you don't really know […] there's not a great pain, there's no a great sense of loss which is…it feels strange to say that you know, it's just he wasnae as much of a significant figure in my life to really affect me that badly"

The young men tended to adopt two distinct strategies in dealing with the pain of grief: forgetting or remembering (strategies that were avoidant or non-avoidant). The vast majority took the approach of 'forgetting', using distraction techniques such as self-medication and keeping themselves busy to take their minds off the loss. This approach may provide short-term benefits but often proves maladaptive in the long term (Suls and Fletcher, 1985; Worden, 1983).

> "the more I drank the more I wouldnae think of him basically […] Not to forget about him, but forget about that [death]"

> "I felt a lot of things, a lot of things I hadnae really felt before. And I didnae know how to deal with them so I just didnae deal with them. I forgot about them."

Stoicism was evident among many of the young men, who felt it was best that they just 'get on with things' and often displayed a dispassionate attitude towards death. Many young men took their cue from their parents, particularly fathers, in that feelings towards the event were bottled up either to protect the children, or as their own coping response. When parents did show their vulnerability this was often a great shock to the young men, who tended to subscribe to the school of thought that 'men don't cry'.

> "I'll just keep plodding on. It's all you can do. Sooner you realise that the better cos eventually everyone is going to die anyway"

> "I mean I've never seen my dad cry…when ma Granda died I didn't see him greet, when ma Gran died I didn't see him greet"

'Not talking' was a recurring theme and the restricted communication that was common in these young men's families, often with the good intention of protecting young people by shielding them from pain, was carried forward to the prison environment, where open expression of emotion is even less likely. Simone (2008) indicates that such a communication style can hinder positive growth and adaption by preventing the assimilation of positive memories. Certainly avoidant coping strategies often led to the young men acting out their frustrations, although not always consciously. It appeared as though many became numb and detached following a bereavement and ceased to believe in their own life or future and therefore the consequences of their behaviour. This seemed particularly true of those young men who were already displaying some difficulties or challenges in their lives, with many feeling that the bereavement exacerbated existing problems. Others directly attributed the loss to their being in prison.

> "I just didnae bother with anything, even the police they didn't scare me, they didn't bother me anymore"

> "Like I don't think I would be here if my Gran didnae die because my behaviour kinda changed, I'd no been in prison before […] but after my Gran died everything got worse just from there"

The prison was also a challenging environment in which to deal with the pain of bereavement. The dominant macho culture did not promote the display of any form of vulnerability or weakness, and the young men tended to put on a front in order to maintain their status. In addition prison removed the young men from their usual social support networks which was felt keenly by some. Lastly the much employed technique of 'distraction' was found to be difficult to employ while subject to the boundaries and routines of daily prison life.

> "Some people really try and put on a brave face, I haven't seen anyone cry […] because you don't want to show anything like that for reputation or something like that"

> "Too much time to think. There's no enough things that you can do to get oot and like take your mind off it. Outside there's always something, people will turn tae drink, some people will go to work, go shopping, something like that […] but in here you cannae do nothing, nothing man, you're just stuck watching the telly."

Despite the macho culture there was also evidence of genuine empathy and informal support offered between the young men at times of bereavement:

> "Today. This morning. My wee pal's Gran died. And I went and sat with him and told him 'I'm here for you if you need me'. If he needs me to talk, or a shoulder to cry on or anything. I said 'if you want to cry, cry. Don't feel bad to show your emotions cos you're going through a hard time' He doesnae cry but he's a young wee guy and he told me straight up that 'after this I'm gonna have a wee greet and try and get it out of my system'. But if he needs me I'll be there for him. I've known the wee guy for a while so he knows he can trust me. That's half the battle."

Funerals also offered an important outlet for young men by allowing an external showing of grief for many who otherwise bottled up their emotions. Young men seemed to consider a funeral as a socially acceptable place in which to express their true feelings.

> "I was sad, that was the only time I ever cried over her at the funeral…I think that's when I came to reality that she wouldn't be coming back…and everyone else was greeting".

Adjusting To The New Environment

It was clear that adjustment had not been easy, and from many of the young men's experiences it was evident that this had not occurred. Their stories were rich with descriptions about the pain of grief and light on the experiences of adjustment, despite being asked specifically about how they had coped with bereavement. The huge sense of loss experienced by these young men was often evident in their choice of language, using the symbolism of a hole, or the empty chair. This gave a sense of the enormity of the adjustment that they needed to make:

> "She'd listen to us and she was like one of the only people that I did have a good relationship with at the time and then after she passed I just didn't have anybody to talk to and I just kinda stumbled into a wee hole there for a wee while…"

> "then when you go to their house and you see my Granda, but Gran's not there sitting in the chair she's always sitting in…that's really hard. I think that's when it really hits you because you've always got this routine, you see them in that chair and then they're not…"

However, many of the young men found that the most difficult aspect of the bereavement was not necessarily the loss itself, but rather the wider impact that the bereavement had on their life, or the far-reaching 'ripples' of losing a loved one. Family breakdown following a bereavement was a common experience.

> "it was really upsetting to see him like that, because […] he changed and that just made me a wee bit more aware of all the ripples of death you know…"

> "We were all worried because we never knew if we were going to be split up, or what was gonnae happen…"

A small minority of the young men did take the approach of consciously 'remembering' (actively taking part in bereavement rituals and dealing with the pain of their loss). Although not cross-referenced with the mental health screen, these young men appeared to be more likely to be in a position to reflect positively on the deceased person and their life. The process of 'remembering' seemed to have facilitated the task of adjustment and allowed the young men to develop and maintain a positive and appropriate connection to the deceased person, paving the way for the successful completion of each of Worden's four tasks of mourning.

> "I spent a lot of time with the boys' families, it was good, watching hunners of videos of us all growing up. I just spent a lot of time with them and basically kinda helped them through it and helped me through it kinda thing…"

> "Everybody will all get together and we'll go for a drink, that day we'll go for lunch and tell stories and talk about it"

As well as funeral attendance, other less obvious bereavement rituals that facilitate adjustment were impacted upon by prison life, such as attending graves, or participating in shared remembering with family and friends:

> "Every year we go to where her ashes are scattered and it just, it's no so much like a sad event, we don't mourn her death we celebrate her life […] It does bother me, it's no as if like going there is a good thing, it's just being together and remembering her and being excluded from that you know cos I'm here, that was hard."

However, some of the young men also recognised positives in the prison environment that helped them adjust to their bereavements in an adaptive way. The passing of time allowed some young men to calm down while they were in prison and not exact revenge in the heat of the moment. Others benefited from the interventions and the support provided by the prison, or found that the stability of being in custody allowed them the time and space to deal with their issues an adjust to their losses:

> "I think it's kinda better in here than oot, if I was oot there and it happened again […] I'd have ended up battering them"

> "I never really dealt with ma Gran passing until after I came in here know what I mean? Started working through like that and all the other issues I had going know what I mean […] it was just having a bit of support knowing that in here there was staff I could talk to"

Most of the young men had not sought professional support to help them adjust to their bereavements, they had not seen the need to do so and indicated that they were unlikely to do so in the future as they could and should deal with their bereavements in their own way. Only one young man had received support from a counsellor and while he could clearly highlight the benefits of this intervention, most notably in having someone neutral to offload on, he also felt that the timing of support had been unhelpful.

> "Sometimes it would be easier to talk to the counsellor I think […] because you don't want yer family to worry as much, but if it's just you yourself and the counsellor you could be honest […] I think it would have been better if they'd left it a bit of time and then I'd seen a counsellor. I think I was still in shock, ended up rushing, wanting to talk and talk about it."

> "You know I dealt with it in my own time and I feel things might have been slightly easier if I'd went and looked for a bit of help […] but I think that's made me a stronger person"

However all young men suggested that having someone to talk to was important for bereaved young people, and although many were certain that this style of intervention was not for them, it was recognised that other people might need such support. People whom the young men could trust, and people who had shared similar experiences were identified as the easiest people to talk to.

> "Just somebody tae talk to know what I mean […] sometimes that just makes things a wee bit easier when you know that someone is willing to listen"

It is also important to note that, although many of the young men were adamant that talking was not for them, many also seemed to enjoy telling the stories of their loved ones. Gilbert (2002: p224) writes that "telling one's story served as a tool for dealing with loss and trauma" when studying accounts of war veterans and Bosticco and Thompson (2005) state that constructing stories about loved ones has an important role in processing grief. Narratives have also been found to predict how well a person will adjust to the death of a loved one by analysing the content of the story for the level of positive emotions and content (Gilbert, 2002).

> "It's actually been really good, see even just this, just answering a few questions, speaking about it, bringing back up some of the memories and stuff you know. You come in and you forget about people cos of day-to-day life or your own problems and I think it's been good to come back up and just kinda speak about some of the people that aren't here, some of the better times and then…it's strange but it's the first time I've felt something in quite a while…"

The research literature indicates that men do not seek help even when they are in severe emotional distress or at crisis point (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Sayers et al., 2004), a finding that is attributed to poor emotional and mental health literacy (Sayers et al., 2004). Young men themselves acknowledged that it was very difficult to ask for help and that being able to do so anonymously may be of benefit. To this end some young men also felt that services should be better promoted and their use actively encouraged.

> "I mean it's OK to say that people need counsellors but it's a lot to ask for help, so I think something like even if you can talk anonymously, you know like a phone line or even just somewhere to write a letter, even if you don't get any answer once you take the step of speaking about it you're halfway to solving the problem. Asking for help is one of the biggest steps."

Moving On And Reinvesting Emotionally

Many of the young men had experienced multiple bereavements and there was a sense that in such instances death had become an inevitable part of the young man's world view. The interviews revealed a number of bereavements that had simply not been reported on in the initial survey and also highlighted a sense of detachment and emotional isolation as a result of the bereavements. In these situations it was easy to see the challenges in moving on and reinvesting emotionally in their future:

> "I've certainly not cared about people as much, because after losing friends, and losing friends before, I was probably wondering 'why is this happening to me?' kinda thing"

> "I was thinking about like 'how many more people do I have to see die? Am I gonnae grow up and see everybody die off?' know what I mean? That was the way I kinda felt, I'm only 19 and that's five people died already and I keep thinking to myself 'are the rest of them gonna die?' know what I mean then I'll grow up alone."

Not all bereavements however, had a long-lasting negative impact, and some young men could identify positive outcomes arising from some bereavements. Among these were a sense of the importance of family and of pulling together. While losing interest in things was a common response to bereavement, this not only included losing interest in positive things that they enjoyed, but also negative activities too. In this sense the bereavement caused them, or a family member, to reflect on life and to use the sad event as an opportunity to refocus, readjust and reinvest in their relationships:

> "it makes you question the decisions you make, I think anyway, well I felt that I could make a decision one day and that could be your life gone and I think a lot of people don't realise that, that there's things in your life that you may think 'oh we'll go out and have a drink tonight and fight with this boy or that' and that could be your last night"

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is clear that the young men had experienced high levels of multiple, traumatic and difficult losses. The MAYSI-2 revealed that young men who had been bereaved scored higher than those who had not, and that those who had experienced more 'difficult' bereavements tended to score higher than those who had a more 'typical' bereavement experience. That any differences lacked statistical significance may be due to high levels of mental health needs among the prison population in general (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2008) or may be as a result of small and uneven sample sizes and the use of the screen on a wider population than that on which it had been normed. Further large scale research, using a range of tools, is required to substantiate and develop these exploratory and indicative findings.

Young men often found that a bereavement exacerbated any existing difficulties that they were having with family, behaviour or substances. Some young men directly attributed bereavement as a contributory factor to their arrival in custody. While a short-term negative bereavement reaction from children and young people is normal, these findings suggest that bereavement can result in negative outcomes. Where there is significant negative impact from the bereavement, the literature suggests that interventions are helpful, especially holistic approaches that strengthen protective factors and increase resilience (Akerman & Statham, 2011). Thus, this research highlights the importance of providing a range of bereavement provision in childhood and in the community before problems escalate.

It was clear that when a bereavement did occur the realities of prison life interrupted all aspects of the grieving process. However, prison also offers a unique opportunity to deal with bereavements that have not been processed and male prisoners have been found to be more likely to access Cruse bereavement counselling while in prison than when in the community (Wilson, 2010). Certainly some of the young men in this research acknowledged that it was only when they were stable in custody that they could start to confront their losses.

This raises the question about what the prison can actually do to address bereavement issues in their population. Prisons should routinely screen for bereavements and any negative impacts on entry in to prison and throughout the duration of stay. Prisons also need to provide an environment that encourages non-avoidant strategies to dealing with bereavement. Finding ways to encourage young men to seek help can only improve their outcomes and the teaching of emotional literacy in schools as a way to assist all young people, but particularly the bereaved, to manage their emotions has been advocated as a positive early intervention approach (Ribbens McCarthy, 2005). While an early intervention approach is preferable, even in prison it is never too late to have the opportunity to address emotional literacy as a means to facilitate the processing of grief. There was also evidence of informal peer support networks already in existence and, although not all young men appeared to have access to such support, it may be possible to

build on this in taking forward bereavement interventions within the prison. A pilot of a support group for adult male prisoners found significant differences in personal growth, despair, blame and anger pre and post intervention (Wilson, 2010).

Although take-up of bereavement services is low among young people (Finlay and Jones, 2000; Vaswani, 2008) these findings indicate that young men may participate, and benefit from 'talking' in the prison environment if this is focused on discourse about the person and their story and not necessarily on the emotions (Walter, 1997). Indeed Walter (1997) recommends taking a biographical approach to dealing with the bereaved. Further exploration of narrative and 'story-telling' approaches to bereavement (both group and individual) may therefore prove fruitful in encouraging participation in interventions and in improving outcomes for a vulnerable and troubled group of young men.

Lastly, visits to the terminally ill, funeral attendance, and the ability to say goodbye, were of utmost importance to the young men, and they wished to be able to do so without embarrassment or appearing disrespectful to the deceased and their family. While young men acknowledged the rules and understood the reasons for them, consideration should be given to maximising the flexibility afforded to funeral attendance and being creative where this is not feasible. Examples could include using new technology to stream or record funerals (Hendry, 2009) or finding alternative ways to allow the young person to participate in the rituals surrounding the death (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2008).

This research has added to the evidence-base by providing early indications about the nature of bereavement experiences and the potential mental health needs among young men in prison. In addition the research has filled a knowledge gap by providing insight into young men's experiences of bereavement.

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