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GRIEVING DURING COVID-19: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE BEREAVED DURING THE FIRST TWO WAVES OF THE PANDEMIC

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Introduction The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on all aspects of life. The high number of deaths and bereavements increased demand on already stretched services, whilst the unique circumstances caused by enforced social distancing meant that people bereaved at this time faced many additional challenges and potentially problematic grief trajectories.

Aims To explore in depth people's lived experiences of bereavement during the Covid-19 pandemic, their adaptation and coping during this time, and the effect of informal and formal sources of bereavement support.

Methods Semi-structured longitudinal telephone interviews were conducted with people bereaved during the first 10 months of the pandemic (March to December 2020), purposively sampled from a cohort of survey participants. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically.

Results 24 participants (19 female; 5 men) took part in a first interview and 15 in a follow up interview, approximately four months later. Five major themes were identified: End of life experiences; Funerals and memorialisation; Grieving and psychological impacts; Coping and adaptation and Sources of support. Many challenges relating to the pandemic context were identified, including restrictions to end of life and memorialisation arrangements, dealing with personal affairs, and lack of support. Such experiences negatively impacted individual grieving and wellbeing, in particular feelings of isolation and guilt surrounding lack of contact with the deceased. Participants experienced difficulties accessing services, and sometimes received support that was not appropriate for their particular situations and needs. Despite these difficulties, some people demonstrated remarkable resilience, and ability to cope and find meaning.

Conclusions People bereaved in the COVID-19 pandemic have navigated grief and bereavement through exceptionally challenging circumstances, often lacking the informal and formal support needed to help them cope.

Impact These insights can be used to help improve the care and support provided to bereaved people throughout their bereavement journeys.

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A RAPID EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL GRIEF CAFÉS ACROSS TWO NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

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Introduction Restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted bereavement as: visiting the dying, funerals, family meetings, access to bereavement services were

disrupted. Pandemic work at Public Health England and Test and Trace was unrelenting. Enforced home working enhanced isolation. Many colleagues experienced difficult bereavements with little access to normal support networks.

Aims To further understand how a workplace grassroots virtual grief café can support the bereaved.

Methods A grassroots group of bereaved staff and/or with bereavement expertise, established virtual bereavement cafes in May 2021, run by staff for staff. MS Teams (video teleconferencing, chat, signposting to resources) provided a safe, supportive meeting space. Facilitated Cafés are held fortnightly, with mental health first aiders present. Ground rules emphasised respect, confidentiality, the validity of all types of grief and all deaths (pre or during the pandemic). Chat and emojis offered support. Post café email and phone follow-up was offered. Additional themed cafés supported: Grief Awareness Week, the Queen's death, Pregnancy or Infant loss and bespoke sessions run for teams whose colleague had died. A rapid qualitative thematic evaluation to better understand participants experience of grief and how the cafes have helped was carried out in 2022.

Results Between 9–34 staff attend with new participants at each session. All types of grief have been experienced: anticipatory, complicated, cumulative and disenfranchised grief – often in combination. Participants' feedback has been thematically grouped related to their experience of the Grief Cafes, specific workplace challenges, and the impact of the pandemic on grief.

Conclusions There is a significant level of unresolved and complex grief following the COVID-19 pandemic in working-age people.

Impact Virtual cafes provide critical emotional support in geographically dispersed organisations. They work best linking with and driving compassionate workplace policies.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERVENTIONS FOR INFORMAL CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE WITH ADVANCED CHRONIC ILLNESS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Introduction End-stage or advanced chronic illness has deleterious effects on the health and wellbeing of patients and their informal carers. Informal carers are often family members or friends who provide support and care to the patient. Informal carers experience many challenges associated with their caring role, which can impact their own wellbeing. Whilst there is growing evidence about the impact on carers; guidance on support for informal caregivers of patients with advanced, non-malignant, chronic conditions is lacking. There is little information available on effective psychosocial interventions for these carers.

Aims To explore effectiveness of psychosocial interventions for informal caregivers of people with advanced or end-stage chronic, non-malignant illness.