

LEVELS OF GRIEF, SUPPORT NEEDS AND RISK FACTORS AMONG PEOPLE BEREAVED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: BASELINE RESULTS FROM A LONGITUDINAL UK ONLINE SURVEY

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Background The COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on millions of people's experiences of bereavement. Traumatic end-of-life experiences and disruptions to support networks increase chances of poor bereavement outcomes.

Aim To examine grief and support needs, and identify associated risk factors.

Methods Mixed-methods survey of people bereaved in the UK from March 2020-January 2021, disseminated via media, social media, national associations, community/charitable organisations. Practical and emotional support needs were assessed in 13 domains, and grief intensity using the Adult Attitude to Grief (AAG) scale, which calculates an overall index of vulnerability (IOV) (range 0–36).

Results 711 participants, mean age 49.5 (SD 12.9); 88.6% female; 95.3% white. Mean age of deceased 72.2 (SD 16.1); 58% died in hospital; 44% from COVID-19. Mean IOV was 20.41 (95% CI = 20.06 to 20.77), i.e. high vulnerability in grief overall. 28.2% exhibited extreme levels of vulnerability (i.e., IOV \geq 24). In six support domains, all relating to psycho-emotional support, 50% to 60% of respondents reported high/fairly high levels of need. Increased levels of perceived support from health professionals led to significantly ($P < 0.001$) lower levels of grief and support need (small/medium effect, $P < 0.001$). Bereaved participants who were socially isolated/lonely experienced higher levels of grief and support needs than those who were not ($P < 0.001$). Grief and support needs were much higher for close family members compared with other groups ($P < 0.05$). Levels of grief and support needs were slightly higher for COVID deaths compared with non-COVID ($P < 0.01$), although this was not significant in a mixed model.

Conclusions People bereaved during the pandemic experience high levels of grief and emotional support needs, with social isolation/loneliness and death of a close family member particular risk factors. Healthcare professionals' support is associated with better bereavement experiences.