

**Poster Session IV
Poster #10**

Exploring Parental Grief: Practice and Policy Implications

Joan Arnold, PhD, RN, Hunter College, New York, NY ~ Penelope Buschman Gemma, MS, RN, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Columbia University, New York, NY

Purpose: This study explores parental grief on the death of a child of any age. A child's death is an incomprehensible and devastating loss. Parental grief is a lifelong connection between parent and child. To extend and deepen current understanding of parental grief, a survey instrument was developed combining quantitative and qualitative measures.

Theoretical Framework: A reconceptualization of parental grief as a complex, non-linear, lifelong process is proposed. As parents live with their loss, grief is enfolded, shaping and defining a new and transformed identity.

Methods: A survey instrument was developed specifically to study parents who experienced the death of a child during their lifetimes. The sampling frame consisted of 74 respondents. This was a cross-sectional, retrospective, self-administered survey by mail. All quantitative data were entered into an SPSS data file and analyzed using standard bivariate techniques. Qualitative data were analyzed using a coding scheme, coding domains were compared and reconciled. In addition to standard demographic items (17), the instrument included quantitative (52) as well as qualitative (11) measures of grief, loss, and related variables.

Results: The study offers empirical support for the notion of grief as ongoing in the life of a parent whose child has died. Parental grief is profound and has lasting effects on parents, regardless of the years that have passed since the death, the age of the child at the time of death, and the cause of the child's death.

Conclusions and Implications: The findings serve to inform the development and provision of services for bereaved parents. Further clinical research should explore commonalities in the experience of grieving families regardless of the cause of and time since the death of their child. Child death can be recognized not only as a women's health concern but also as a concern in pediatrics, men's health and geriatrics.