



The Impact of Child Loss on Career Decision-Making and Trajectory

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Motivation for Undertaking Research

Child loss is deeply personal. 8,397 people under age 30 died in the UK in 2020 creating approximately 16,794 bereaved working-age parents in that year alone. As a bereaved parent, and newly qualified Careers Adviser, stories shared by other bereaved parents has highlighted a gap in knowledge about the impact of child loss on careers. To date there has been no published research looking at child loss and careers specifically. As a profession which has a duty of care to all our clients, career practitioners should be aware of the range of challenges faced by bereaved parents making career decisions and incorporate this awareness into their professional practice.

Research Question

How does the loss of a living child/children impact on career development? Underpinning this are 4 specific objectives:

1. Using a broad range of identifiers determine if there are any patterns/themes in career decision making in bereaved parents.
2. Identify participant perspectives on the impact of loss of a child/children on career trajectory and career decision-making.
3. Identify participant perspectives on career support available for bereaved parents.
4. Identify recommendations for career practitioners working with those who have experienced the loss of a child.

Literature Review Key Themes

Grief experiences are unique to individuals, and an initial review of the literature identified several common themes relating to gender, socioeconomic status, occupation and finding meaning and purpose in work following bereavement.

Parental bereavement is known to be multi-dimensional and bereaved parents are at higher risk of developing complicated grief. This grief continues for many years after a child has died, perhaps never-ending (Arnold & Gemma 2008). A study by Murphy et al (2003) reported that nearly 70% of the parents who took part in their research noted that it took 3 – 4 years to assimilate their child's death and continue with their own lives, regardless of reason for death. However, these parents still reported higher levels of mental health conditions when compared to the general population in the same age range, five years after their child died (Murphy, Das Gupta et al 1999 as cited in Murphy et al 2003). It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that ongoing grief symptoms will also impact working life yet very little research has been conducted.

Methodology

There is no previously published research in this area. Using a quantitative research approach survey, baseline data will be gathered that can generate avenues for future research. Survey participants will be asked to answer a range of questions relating to career prior to the death of their child, and then at 6 months, 2 years and current status post bereavement. Free text boxes provide opportunity to share additional information. A series of demographic questions will enable comparison on a range of variables including gender, age, socioeconomic status and education level. The survey will firstly be published on The Compassionate Friends UK (TCF) closed Facebook page. A snowball approach will be adopted, and participants will be encouraged to share the survey with other bereaved parents not in TCF.

Influence of gender, socioeconomic status, age and educational attainment level on career decisions

Cognitive, affective, behavioural, social and emotional changes caused by grief

The Bereaved Parent

Impact of bereavement on world of work e.g. adjustments, performance, co-worker relationships

Circa 16,734 bereaved working-age parents created in 2020