

Parental Grief After the Unexpected Death of a Child: A Scoping Review About the Impact on Parent's Social Networks and the Function of Self-Help Groups

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Abstract

The unexpected death of a child, whether due to accident, sudden death syndrome, suicide, or homicide, causes profound parental grief that endures for years. Often, this grief is not fully understood by the social environment, leading parents to feel increasingly misunderstood and isolated. While initial support may be provided, it can become insufficient over time. Therefore, many parents turn to support groups, finding multiple benefits such as validation of their feelings, a safe space to discuss their children and express emotions, strengthening of their social identity, and a platform for reconstructing meaning in their lives. A scoping review was carried on to review the state of knowledge regarding the role that self-help groups can play in case of bereavement due to the unexpected death of a child and regarding the impact on social relationships referred to in these contexts. The search was conducted on 11 databases and grey literature and provided 22 final results. Reviewed studies confirm the impact of this loss, particularly on mothers, and suggest that self-help groups contribute to a more favorable development of the grieving process. Despite the scarcity of research, future studies could leverage newer theoretical models and measurement tools to confirm protective, predictive, and risk factors.

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