

Men and Suicide Bereavement

Franklin Cook, Unified Communities Solutions
Sally Spencer-Thomas, Carson J Spencer
Foundation
Rick Mogil, Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services

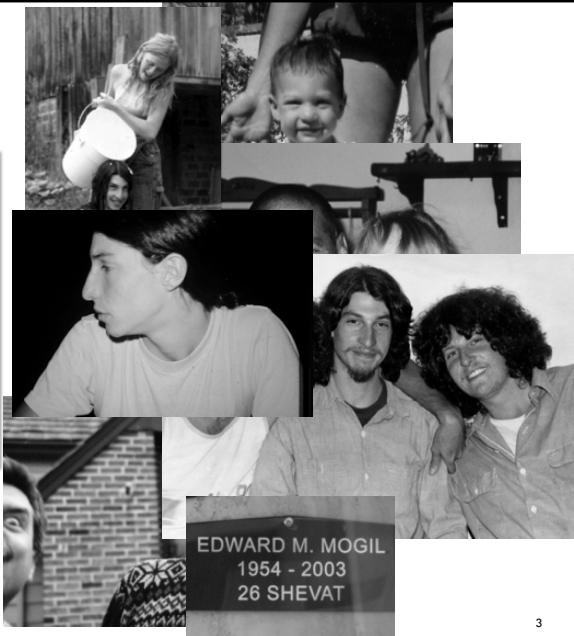


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Stories from the Front Line

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ED



EDWARD M. MOGIL
1954 - 2003
26 SHEVAT

3

Joseph
Hickman
Cook



4

Carson & Robert



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Overview

- Process and Outcomes of Men and Suicide Bereavement Survey
- Discussion

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History of Men and Suicide Bereavement Survey

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History

- Shared passion for supporting people bereaved by suicide
- Shared passion for preventing further suicides among working aged men
- Gap Analysis: How do men grieve a death by suicide?
- Survey – understand experiences, what was working? What was missing?
- Survey creation and distribution (Fall 2013)
 - AAS Listserv, TAPS mailing list, Grief after Suicide newsletter list, Alliance of Hope Facebook, POS-FFOS listserv, Canada list & Australia list

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Swallowed by a Snake: Honoring Men's Path to Healing

- Unconscious grieving
- Men grieving together "Gender differences exist and need to be honored"
- Rituals as pressure releases
- Positioning strength in healing process



Gordon, T. (1996) Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing and A Man You Know is Grieving: 12 Ideas for Helping Him Heal From Loss

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Didi Hirsch – Lessons Learned

- Most men attend groups to support their spouse/partner
- Tendency to speak for the spouse/partner in group
- When we have two groups running at the same time in a location it is easier to have the spouses attend separate groups
- Intakes are done separately for each spouse



Suicide Prevention Center
There is hope and there is help...

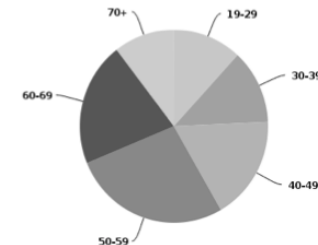
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Survey Results

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Participants

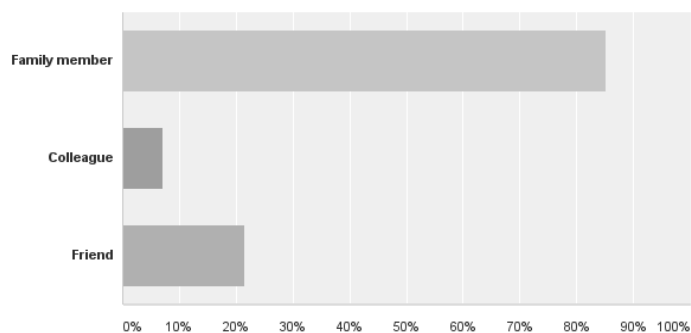
- N=191
- 19-70+ years old, 58% over 50 years old
- 93% white; 89% straight
- Mostly adult men who lost adult men (fathers, sons, brothers)



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Q4 The person (or people) whose death by suicide affected you was your (choose all that apply):

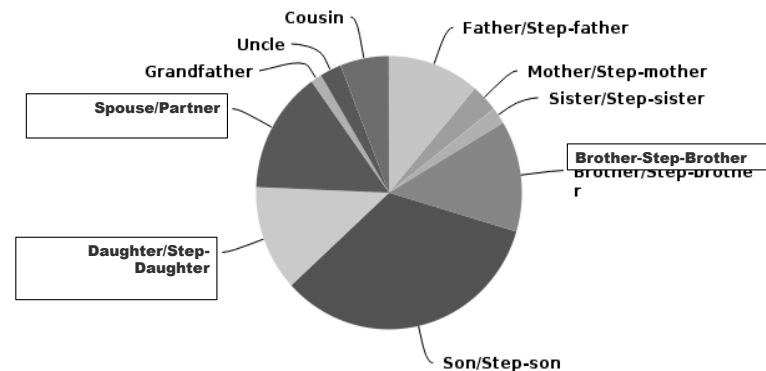
Answered: 182 Skipped: 9



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Q5 If you answered "family member" above, please indicate the deceased's relationship to you. The deceased was your...

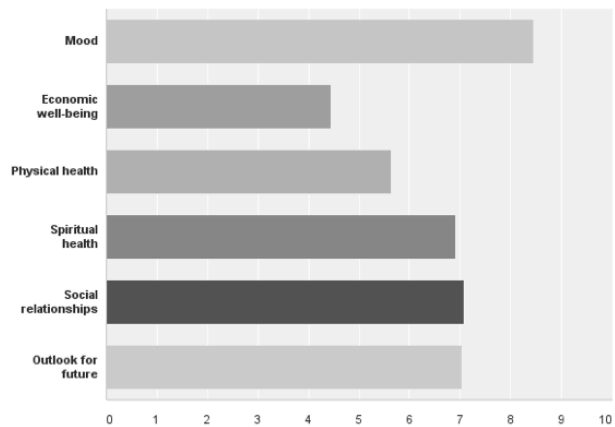
Answered: 152 Skipped: 39



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Q9 How much did your grief affect your life? 1="Not at all" and 10="A Tremendous Amount"

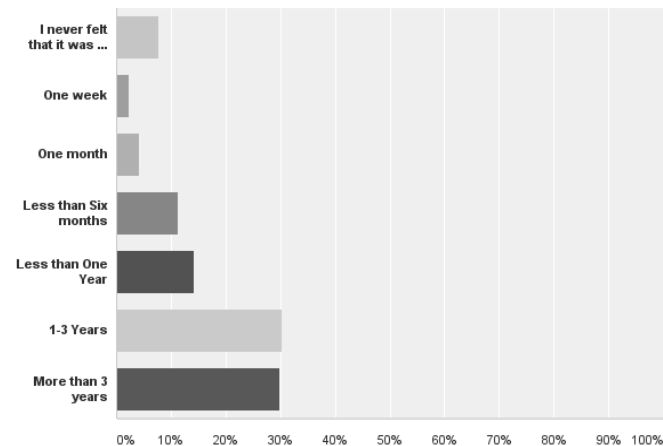
Answered: 182 Skipped: 9



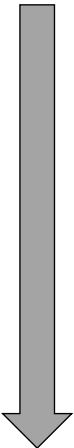
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Q10 How long did it take for you to feel that your grief was no longer a constant difficulty in your life?

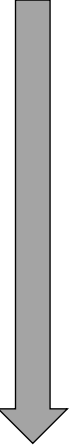
Answered: 168 Skipped: 23



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Type of Support	Average Rating	
Emergency Department (ER) Staff	1.31	<p>Least Helpful</p>  <p>Most Helpful</p>
Other Hospital Staff	1.41	
Emergency Medical Services	1.43	
Employee Assistance Program	1.60	
Primary Care Physician	1.68	
Police	1.76	
Other Grief Support Group	2.08	
On-line grief support community	2.13	
Colleagues	2.32	
Funeral Director	2.35	
Clergy	2.48	
Grief Counselor	2.64	
Other individual survivors of suicide loss	2.77	
Suicide Grief Support Group	2.88	
Friends	3.01	

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FORMAL SUPPORT SERVICES		
Type of Support	Average Ranking	
Text support	4.24	<p>Least Helpful</p>  <p>Most Helpful</p>
Faith-based support	4.99	
Chat support	5.52	
Recorded information (e.g., podcast or CD) on suicide bereavement for men	6.10	
Telephone support (e.g., help-line)	6.14	
Printed brochure on suicide bereavement for men	7.54	
Internet-based one-on-one counseling	7.62	
Internet-based support group	8.04	
Face-to-face therapeutic group (professionally facilitated grief support group)	8.19	
Book on suicide bereavement for men	8.99	
Face-to-face professional help (one-on-one counseling)	9.04	
Internet-based information	9.29	
Face-to-face small group help (support group, peer facilitated)	9.49	
Face-to-face individual help (one-on-one peer support)	9.80	

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Gender and Grief

- 81% felt that men and women grieve differently (“quite a bit” to “a lot”)
- 52% felt strongly that men should have special programs to deal with their grief (25% weren’t sure)
- 79% strongly desired male peer support in grieving process
- 67% said they would be willing to help other men bereaved by suicide
 - Many who said they couldn’t were still too early in healing process
 - Some indicated that helping others helps themselves

What helped?

- **Family and friends** (mentioned abundantly)
- **Support groups:** “It was the only environment where I felt as though I wasn’t alone, I wasn’t judged.”
- **Counseling** (one-on-one interactions valued)
- **Listening:** “Those who listened without judgment”
- **Presence:** “People who ...’walked with me’ through my pain”
- **Supportiveness:** “Validation and care” “Caring, understanding”
- **Peers:** “Other survivors understand on a level that no one else can.”
- **Helping others:** “Talking to others as they dealt with their grief ...about how to deal with and survive a loved one’s suicide.”

In Addition

- Religion
 - Power of faith
 - Helpfulness of clergy
 - Congregation as "family"
- Other
 - Colleagues (sometimes synonymous with "friends")
 - EAP and referrals
 - M.D., including meds
 - 12-Step & recovery
 - Funeral director

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Abundant Help

- *"I had ample resources available to me, and I used them."*
- *"The people that made themselves available to my family went above and beyond."*
- *"I can't think of a resource that wasn't available."*

Nothing Helped

- *"I never even thought to seek out support, and nobody suggested it."*
- *"There really is nothing that helps."*
- *"I'm a guy ... I did not ask for help ... so none was offered."*

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What was not helpful?

- **Family:** *"My family wasn't helpful at all ... We all seemed to have to deal with it on our own."*
- **Friends:** *"People you've known for years can't deal with it and bail."*
- **Support groups:** *"The support group just re-hashed tragic stories over and over, and it took my wife and I backwards."*
- **Lack of understanding:** *"Few understand the complications of this unique type of grief." "NOT willing to see the elephant in the room"*
- **Negative communications** (abundant examples): *"Many [people] said things that were hurtful." "Most people were shaming."*
- **Isolation:** *"No one was around." "Taboo subject"*

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Professionals

- **Counselors:** *"Some counselors were more interested in their own personal benefit than in my pain."*
- **Funeral directors:** *"Their actions actually made [it] a lot harder to deal with the whole situation."*
- **Clergy:** *"My clergyman, at the time, literally didn't know what to say to me. He told me that."*
- **Physician:** *"Doctors put me on depression tablets, but I'm grieving ... wish they understood the difference."*
- **EAP:** *"After about a week [was] saying, 'Well you have been in here many times ... Maybe you should get some work [done] ...'"*
- **First responders:** *"Police just acted like, yep, another suicide." "Emergency responders ... behaved like a pack of baboons, joking, refusing to give any info."*

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Gender and Grief

Grief is individualistic

- *"Everyone has their own way of grieving."*
- *"I am not sure that men and women grieve differently, but I believe people grieve differently."*
- *"I found it more related to individuals than to gender."*

Men grieve as women do:

- *"I tend to be more outwardly emotional."*
- *"I have no problem showing and sharing my grief experience."*
- *"We internalize a ton and big boys don't cry -- which is a bunch of bull shit. You lose a loved one to suicide and guess what ... you cry. A lot!"*

Male Stereotypes

- Strong: *"We don't want to seem weak."*
- Nonexpressive: *"I feel bad when I start to cry."*
- Masculinity: *"Don't think [grieving] the manly thing to do"*
- Individualism: *"Men seem to want to deal with and conquer their grief demon by themselves."*
- Stoicism: *"I am a realist ... my loved one is gone."*
- Action-oriented: *"I threw myself back into work and that helped me."*
- Solution-oriented: *"[Men] tend to try to help or fix things."*
- Seek control: *"I think men ... try and act in control instead of expressing it when necessary."*

Male Stereotypes

- Less emotive: *Most men have difficulties showing the type of emotion that comes with grief*
- (Exception) Anger: *[Men may] get in fights with others, become disruptive at work*
- More cognitive: *I wanted to "know" & so researched extensively*
- Process internally: *"We hold on to it inside, tend to bury grief*
- Somatic reaction: *"[Men] may develop physical ailments."*
- Use AOD to cope: *"I drink so much now ! Too much!*
- User humor to cope: *"[We need] a guy group for guys ... but no one would show up :(Why? Because we're guys!"*

Criticism (of Self, of Men)

Failure to show up:

- *"Perhaps they [counselors] would have been of more significance if I had continued to see them."*
- *"Men do not usually make time for this."*

Failure to ask:

- *I'm not really one to seek out help*
- *Men don't reach out*

Doing grief "wrong":

- *"Men try to pretend they're not affected ... a great deal of denial."*
- *"We need to be taught [that] it's necessary to grieve openly."*

Nurture, Not Nature

- *"The differences can be explained by male socialization and societal stigma -- they're not inherent."*
- *"Society has made men who do not often express those types of feelings because men should be 'tough.'"*
- *"I was taught to be emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually strong."*
- *"More social acceptance for women to grieve openly."*
- *"Men are victims of a gender stereotype that says we must be strong, not show weakness, not ask for help."*
- *"I believe that any differences in grieving patterns are due to cultural influences."*

Conclusions and Next Steps

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Conclusions

- Impact of suicide is profound and sustained for men
- Informal services
 - most helpful friends, family, peers
 - least helpful emergency and medical services
- Formal services
 - most helpful peer support groups/one-on-one peer assistance and Internet information
 - least helpful – interactive technology (not used?)
- Men and women grieve differently and male stereotypes/self-criticism get in the way
- Men would like male peers to help and would be willing to be one

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Next Steps

- Further exploration of models of men supporting men through grief process (individual, group, on-line)
- Actively engage men about how stereotypes get in the way of the grief process
- Challenge social norms: "typical guy" does this, but I don't
- Message men to men – permission to grieve

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