

PARENTS' ACCOUNTS OF THE GRIEF EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BEREAVED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RESULTS FROM A UK-WIDE ONLINE SURVEY

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10.1136/spcare-2021-MCRC.15

Introduction Many children and young people have experienced the death of close family members during the Covid- 19 pandemic, whilst also facing unprecedented disruption to their daily routines and support networks.

Aims This study investigated their bereavement experiences and support needs as described by their parents/guardians.

Method We disseminated a UK-wide online survey through social media platforms and community/charitable organisations, capturing the grief experiences of adults bereaved during the pandemic. Parent/guardian free-text responses (N=106) to a question on their child(ren)'s support needs were analysed thematically.

Results Three main themes were identified: the pandemic related challenges and struggles experienced by children and young people; family support and coping; and support from schools and services. Pandemic specific challenges include the impacts of not being able to be with the relative prior to their death, isolation from peers and other family members, and disruption to daily routines and wider support networks.

Examples were given of effective coping and grief-related communication within families, but some parents also described difficulties relating to their own grief and children's pre-existing mental health problems. The important role of schools and bereavement organisations in providing specialist support was valued, but there was evidence of unmet need and difficulties accessing bereavement and mental health support.

Conclusion Children and young people have faced additional strains and challenges associated with pandemic bereavement, with some requiring specialist bereavement or mental health support.

Impact This study provides insight into how children and young people experienced the death of a close family member during the pandemic. We recommend initiatives that facilitate open communication within family, peer and school settings, adequate resourcing of school and community-based specialist services, and increased information and signposting to support.