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Abstract

The emotional impact on families of missing people is profound yet it remains poorly understood and often overlooked. Every year, an estimated 170,000 persons are reported missing in the United Kingdom, with long-term psychological and emotional consequences for their loved ones. Despite the high prevalence of grief and trauma, many affected families do not seek help. Yet effective support services are crucial for building resilience and restoring trust in institutions, improving psychological well-being. However, many doctors, therapists, and the wider public are unaware of these difficulties.

Art-based methodologies can provide a way out of this impasse by helping individuals articulate their experiences and reconstructing personal meaning through narrative and creative expression.

This art-based research explores the impact of moral injury and hermeneutical injustice, when people are denied the resources to interpret their experiences, within the context of ambiguous loss. It includes interviews, creative workshops, and auto-ethnographic storytelling to understand how relatives of missing people make sense of their trauma.

The aim is threefold: to amplify the voices of those affected, offer creative community-building activities for those affected and to integrate their lived experience into medical, nursing, and psychotherapy education. The objective is to use art to increase empathy and understanding. By embedding visual and narrative materials into training programmes, the study hopes to encourage more empathy, recognition, and compassion in care, emphasising the need of therapeutic frameworks that address the unique issues of unresolved loss.

This research contributes novel insights to the body of knowledge on relatives of missing people by offering a diverse range of narrative formats from stories, films, animation to augmented reality paintings, collages, and drawings. It seeks to inform transform and promote person-centred support for families of the missing.

Keywords

families of missing people, trauma, grief, Art therapies