

Qualitative study of the issues faced by UK and Ireland adult males bereaved by suicide.

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Abstract

Background

Government statistics indicate c. 7,000 people are lost to suicide each year across the UK and Ireland. They leave behind as many as c. 1m people exposed to suicide per year. To date, studies of postvention (bereavement support services) have been dominated (80-91%) by female participation. This study explored the barriers and enablers to postvention uptake by men from numerous perspectives.

Method

This qualitative study used online semi-structured interviews to gather information for reflexive thematic analysis. Across UK and Ireland support organisations and research institutions, 26 interviews were conducted. These included male suicide loss survivors (SLS) who have embraced support and those who have avoided or eschewed support. Female SLS were also interviewed, plus service providers and academics, to gain their perspectives on male postvention uptake.

Findings

Seven main themes emerged: “It’s completely broken me!” (Trauma and re-traumatisation); “There are rules of engagement.” (Stereotypical male behaviour); “Holding together a facade of just managing.” (Isolation, guilt, relationships etc.); “You don’t talk about these matters.” (Stigma and taboos); “It doesn’t have a beginning, middle and end.” (Support services); “The support that there is, is fabulous...once you find it.” (Support reach); “Bringing it in the normal conversation.” (The need for change). Each theme, other than support reaching those in need, encompasses components that are barriers or enablers and, in some instances, can be considered “two sides of the same coin”.

Discussion

The themes identified provide insights into the mindset of men bereaved by suicide from a cross-section of perspectives. Via the identification of key drivers, regarding male postvention uptake and effectiveness, the study will facilitate support organisations honing their offerings to better meet the needs of male SLS and elucidate behaviours that result in men not receiving vitally needed support, allowing for potential new services to be designed.

Keywords

Suicide, Bereavement, Support services, Men