

GPs' uncertainty at dealing with those bereaved by suicide revealed

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Interviews carried out by The University of Manchester with GPs of parents whose children have died by suicide have revealed a lack of knowledge and confidence on how best to respond to and support those bereaved.

The new study, published in the *British Journal of General Practice*, explored GPs' experiences and perceived needs (emotional, practical and training) when caring for parents bereaved by suicide.

The study was led by the University of Manchester in collaboration with Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, and funded by the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) programme. They recruited parents whose adult children (aged between 18-35 years) had died by suicide between 2002 and 2012 to identify their experiences and perceived needs.

With the parents' consent, the research team interviewed their GP to identify their experiences and perceived needs caring for the bereaved parents. Thirteen GPs were recruited to the study.

Those bereaved by suicide are also significantly at risk of dying by suicide and an important focus of government strategy to help reduce the suicide rate amongst this vulnerable population. Those who have lost love ones struggle to cope and often feel isolated, stigmatised and unsupported. The bereavement has a serious effect on their own mental health and as a result many people turn to their GPs in the first instance.

The interviews revealed that the GPs know this to be the case but as non-specialists, needed support to deal with the difficulties these patients face. They were sometimes personally affected by the suicide of a patient as well and this impacted on their ability to work with the parents.

Dr McDonnell specialises in suicide bereavement research and as a result of this work her research team has designed training for primary care practitioners, such as GPs.

Bereaved families contributed their stories for use in the training which has been very well evaluated. Dr McDonnell is hoping to open this out across the UK.

Findings in this study have also informed the development of the first evidence-based suicide bereavement training internationally which guides health professionals on how to respond to and care for parents bereaved by suicide.

Dr McDonnell added: "This study has advanced our understanding of the vulnerability and perceived needs of GPs caring for [parents](#) bereaved by [suicide](#). Findings have the potential to inform policy and practice."

More information: Foggin E, McDonnell S, Cordingley L, et al. GPs¹ experiences of dealing with parents bereaved by suicide: a qualitative study. *British Journal of General Practice*, 2016; [DOI: 10.3399/bjgp16X686605](#)

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