

The Impact of COVID-19 on Death and Mourning

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Introduction

COVID-19 effectively shook the lives of everyone it touched. Its restrictions, while up for debate, impacted everyone, including the death industry. With social distancing and crowd restrictions, death rituals around the world took a turn, and not for the better. While the rituals themselves were affected, many psychologist have become concerned about improper mourning.

Objectives/Hypothesis

The purpose of this research is to examine how COVID-19 restrictions have impacted death rituals, thus leading to improper or incomplete mourning. Mourning that can not be processed properly may lead to psychological disorders, such as Prolonged Grief Disorder, which has recently been added to the new version of the DSM-5. I hypothesize that COVID-19 will lead to increased mental health problems, including that of Prolonged Grief Disorder.

Materials & Methods

This research was done via a literature review, thus using various articles all from scholarly sources and all accessed using Kent State University credentials.

Literature Findings

Gire (2014) cites Worden (2009) stating that there are four tasks of mourning:

- To Acknowledge the reality of the loss
- To process the pain of grief.
- To adjust to the new world without the deceased.
- To develop a new connection with the deceased while staying on a new path.

Any disruption in these tasks may lead to PGD or other poor bereavement outcomes.

Findings cont.

Jordan & Litz (2014) give the criteria for PGD, which had not been added to the DSM-5 as of their publication. The criteria includes:

- The death of a loved one.
- Clinically intense sorrow and preoccupation with the deceased 12 months after the death.
- Must meet half of the following criteria including: difficulty accepting the death and excessive avoidance of reminders.
- The bereavement is out of proportion for the cultural or traditional norms.

Findings cont.

Selman et al. (2020) notes that deaths due to COVID-19, which often resulted in the loss of traditional mourning has been correlated with PGD and other poor bereavement outcomes.

Image #1

1. Have you lost someone significant to you? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. How many months has it been since your significant other died? ☐ Months

For each item below, please indicate how you currently feel

Since the death, or as a result of the death...	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Overwhelmingly
3. Do you feel yourself longing or yearning for the person who died?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Do you have trouble doing the things you normally do because you are thinking so much about the person who died?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Do you feel confused about your role in life or feel like you don't know who you are anymore (ie, feeling like that a part of you has died)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Do you have trouble believing that the person who died is really gone?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Do you avoid reminders that the person who died is really gone?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Do you feel emotional pain (eg, anger, bitterness, sorrow) related to the death?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Do you feel that you have trouble re-engaging in life (eg, problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Do you feel emotionally numb or detached from others?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Do you feel that life is meaningless without the person who died?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Do you feel alone or lonely without the deceased?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Have the symptoms above caused significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Image #2



Conclusions

It is more likely than not that the restrictions put in place because of COVID-19 have lead to improper mourning. While research has not fully investigated its correlation to PGD, early studies has noticed some correlation, which should prompt further research and greater training for psychologists and counselors alike.

Implications for future work

Since early studies have already started to notice a correlation, it is important to examine this early correlation further in hopes to be prepared for the potentially rising cases of PGD. It is also important to prepare a train counselors for this potential rise in cases so that they can treat their patients effectively with the proper amount of knowledge.

References

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