Grieving Alone? Towards an Understanding of the Experience of Bereaved Single Parents: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Abstract:

Parental bereavement has attracted much attention within psychological literature and research and there seems to be a consensus that the death of a child can be one of life's most devastating losses. What appears particularly surprising though is that, despite the fact that single parent families have become an increasingly prevalent family form in most industrialised countries; the experience of bereaved single parents has been largely overlooked as an explicit research focus. This study explores the experience of single parents following the death of a child. An ideographic case study design was adopted and in-depth interviews were conducted with two female participants. Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Resultant themes highlighted distinctive aspects of single parents' life experiences that appear to impact upon their grief. The nature of the single parent-child relationship; positive and negative aspects of 'grieving alone'; and the potential implications of the lack of adequate support resources upon single parents' grief are presented in detail. Findings are considered in light of existing literature on single parenthood and parental bereavement. Implications for theory and psychotherapeutic practice are discussed and recommendations for future research aiming to enhance empirical knowledge in this field are made.

Keywords: *bereavement, counselling, grief, interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative, single parents, therapy.*