SUICIDE SURVIVORS

DEFINING NEEDS AND INTERVENTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

• My Background
  – The Family Loss Project
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• Overview
  – Prominent themes for survivors
  – Risk factors for developing complicated grief
  – Elements of effective interventions
Qualifiers

• Adult survivors
• Not applicable to all survivors, & not limited to just survivors
• Based on both empirical research and clinical observation
PROMINANT THEMES FOR SURVIVORS

• WHY? - Making Sense
• RESPONSIBILITY - Guilt & Blame
• SHAME - Stigma
• ANGER - Rejection & Abandonment
PROMINANT THEMES FOR SURVIVORS

• TRAUMA - Shock & Horror
• RELIEF - The End Of Suffering
• SUICIDALITY – Why Go On?
• SORROW – Grief & Yearning
RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

Before the Death

• Pre-existing Psychiatric Disorder
• Quality Of The Relationship
  – Dependency
  – Conflictual
RISK FACTORS FOR
COMPLICATED GRIEF

At the Time of Death

- Forewarning
- Method / Witnessing
  - Dissociation & flashback symptoms
- Encounters with Police/Rescue/ME
- Location
- Immediate Social Network Response
RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

After the Death

• Longer Term Social Support
  – Blame from others
  – Self – stigmatization
  – Isolation

• Family Disruption
  – Blame
  – Secrecy
  – Communication shut-down
RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

After the Death

• High Risk Grievers
  – High risk categories
    • Isolated elderly males
    • Mothers
    • Siblings, esp. sisters
  – High distress responses
INTERVENTIONS

Postvention Is Prevention

• Identify “At-risk” Survivors & Direct Into Services
• Reduce Risk Factors
• Reduce Isolation & Assist With Social Disruption
• Psychoeducation
• Provide A Safe Context For Doing “Griefwork”
• Family Guidance
INTERVENTIONS

Options

• Organizational Postvention
• Survivor To Survivor Outreach
  – On scene
    • Stabilization, risk assessment, facilitating later involvement (Frank’s data)
    • Later follow-up

• Groups
  – Open, peer led
  – Structured, usually professionally led
  – Advantages/disadvantages
INTERVENTIONS

Options

• Individual Counseling
  – Better monitoring of response
  – Tailored to the particular needs of the survivor
  – In depth working though with neutral, safe person

• Family Counseling
  – Psychoeducation
  – Reduce blame, guilt
  – Improve communication
INTERVENTIONS

Options

• Bibliotherapy & Internet
  – Group therapy “lite”
  – Private and “dosed”
  – .afsp.org; suicidology.org; griefnet.org
• Survivor conferences
  – Psychoeducation
  – Create community
• Network interventions
• Activism
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

• AFSP/NIMH Conference
• Areas for Future Research
  1. Defining and identifying survivors of suicide
  2. Individual vulnerability to distress after suicide
  3. Impact of suicide on family functioning and suicide risk
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

• Areas for Future Research
  4. Interventions for survivors of suicide
  5. Special populations
  6. Research strategies
WRAP-UP

• Questions?
• Comments?
REFERENCES


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