

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Predictors of Continuing Bonds Among Bereaved Adolescents

Sirrione, E. H., Salloum, A., & Boothroyd, R. (2018). Predictors of continuing bonds among bereaved adolescents. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying*, 76(3), 237–255. doi:10.1177/0030222817727632

SUMMARY: Youth often experience continuing bonds (i.e., ongoing relationship to the deceased) after a family member's death; however, little is known about factors that can predict youth continuing bonds. This study had 50 bereaved youth and their caregivers complete questionnaires regarding their continuing bonds and grief symptomatology. Results indicated that youth's continuing bonds were not associated with caregivers' continuing bonds, but instead associated with their own symptomatology and closeness with the deceased.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth's continuing bonds with the deceased family member were not associated with caregiver symptomatology.
- The closer youth were with the deceased family member, the stronger was the continuing bond.
- Youth who showed more symptomatology were more likely to have strong continuing bonds with the deceased family member.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend training to understand the adaptive and maladaptive effects of continuing bonds for youth in military families
- Collaborate with youth professionals to create an open and safe environment for bereaved youth in military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for bereaved youth who recently lost a parent
- Develop workshops for bereaved youth in military families regarding adaptive and maladaptive ways to remember their deceased family member

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support bereavement programs for military families that lost a family member during deployment
- Encourage social media campaigns on military bases regarding the importance of addressing children's needs after losing a family member

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited by email, mail, and provider referrals; the youth participants were clients of bereavement centers.
- The youth and caregivers completed questionnaires separately; measures included youth's and caregivers' continuing bonds with the deceased and their symptomatology.
- Data were analyzed to examine the relationship between youth continuing bonds, caregiver continuing bonds, and youth's and caregivers' bereavement symptomatology.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 50 bereaved youth (52% male) and 46 caregivers (15% male); 42 of the caregivers had one participating youth and four of the caregivers had two participating youth.
- The average age of the youth was 13.32 years (age range = 11-17 years, SD = 1.99) and the average age of the caregivers was 45.17 years (SD = 10.95).
- The youth were primarily White (66%), followed by Black (18%), Latino (8%), Asian American (4%), and other (4%); the caregivers were primarily White (85%), followed by Black (13%), and Latino (2%).

LIMITATIONS

- The youth were recruited from bereavement centers; therefore, they may not represent bereaved youth who did not seek help.
- The caregivers were mostly female (85%), so caution must be taken to generalize the findings to male caregivers.
- The study was based on self-report data, so the results may be subject to memory bias.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between youth grief symptomatology and youth continuing bonds
- Increase the number of male caregiver participants so that the findings can be better generalized
- Explore other factors (e.g., social support, academic performance) that may impact youth's continuing bonds

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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