

Experiences and Coping of Adults with Death of Siblings during Childhood in Chinese Context: Implications for Therapeutic Interventions

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Abstract : The death of a sibling in childhood leads to significant impacts on both the personal and family development of the surviving siblings. Yet, the effects of sibling loss in Chinese societies such as Hong Kong have been inadequately documented in the literature. In particular, there is a gap in the literature about the long term impacts on surviving siblings. This paper explores the experience of adult siblings encountering siblings' death during childhood with the use of in-depth interviews. Through thematic analysis and in-depth interviews, the author explores the impacts on surviving siblings' emotions, coping styles, struggles and challenges, and personal development. Furthermore, the influences on family dynamics are explored thoroughly, including the changes in a family atmosphere, family roles, family relationships, family communication, and parenting styles. More importantly, the author identifies (i) existing continuing bonds, (ii) crying, (iii) adequate social support, (iv) hiding own emotions as a gesture of protecting parents as the crucial elements pertinent to surviving siblings' successful adaptation in the face of sibling loss. In addition, 'child-centered' and 'family-centered' interventions for families with siblings' death in a Chinese context are discussed. With the use of age-appropriate language and children's participation in the preparation of death and after-death arrangements, surviving siblings could be assisted in transforming bereavement into opportunities for growth. In addition, the bereaved family could better cope with grief with open communication platforms, adequate social support, and family education resources. Meanwhile, life-and-death education at both school and community levels could enhance the public's awareness and understanding of the bereaved individuals to prevent creating further harm to them.

Keywords : children and adolescent bereavement, children-centered, family-centered, sibling's death

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