

The Experiences of Hong Kong Chinese Divorced Wives in Facing the Cancer Death of Their Ex-Husbands

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Abstract : With the surge of divorce rate and male cancer onset/death rates, the phenomenon of divorced wives in the facing cancer death of their ex-husbands is not uncommon in Hong Kong. Yet, there is a dearth of study on the experiences of bereaved-divorced wives in the Hong Kong cultural context. This project fills the knowledge gap by conducting a qualitative study for having interviewed four bereaved ex-wives, who returned to ex-husbands' end-of-life caregiving and eventually grieved for the ex-spousal's death. From the perspectives of attachment theory and disenfranchised grief in the Hong Kong cultural context, a 'double-loss' experience is found in which interviewees suffer from the first loss of divorce and the second loss of ex-husbands' death. Traumatic childhood experiences, attachment needs, role ambiguity, unresolved emotions and unrecognized grief are found significant in their lived experiences which alert the 'double-loss' is worthy of attention. Extending a family-centered end-of-life and bereavement care services to divorced couples is called for, in which validation on the attachment needs, ex-couple reconciliation, and acknowledgement on the disenfranchised grief are essential for social work practice on this group of clienteles specifically in Hong Kong cultural context.

Keywords : changing family, disenfranchised grief, divorce, ex-spousal death, marriage

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