



The Phenomenon of Disenfranchised Grief Experienced by Those Bereaved by Suicide: A Contemporary Pastoral Response

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Abstract

For each completed suicide, many lives are forever changed and indications are that subsequent generations feel the impact. This is a sure guarantee that in the course of pastoral ministry life, caregivers will confront at least one, if not several suicide-bereaved people.

The question arising is, how do we respond pastorally into this area? Historically, pastoral responses toward those left to navigate the aftermath of such a tragedy have not been in the main compassionate. Instead, suicide death has invoked violent responses from those mandated to provide comfort and hope, consequently leaving the bereaved at risk to disenfranchised grief.

One way forward in eliminating the potential for disenfranchised grief is providing ongoing education in this highly complex area. A quantitative study of contemporary pastoral responses to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention training was undertaken. Seminars exposed caregivers to a greater understanding of the multifarious issues involved in the life of a suicide and challenges faced by the bereaved, along with awareness of historical legacies still imprinted upon our thinking. The training sought to influence pastoral responses where needed to one of greater empathy, thereby eliminating the potential for suicide-bereaved people experiencing disenfranchised grief.
