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An integrative literature review of bereavement support interventions for newly widowed women experiencing uncomplicated grief

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), older adults, a large portion of whom are widowed, comprise the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population today. Although most recover from grief and its associated symptoms, a substantial minority of spousally bereaved older adults struggle with adaptation to loss and experience complicated grief (Monk, et al., 2008; Worden, 2009). For these individuals, bereavement support interventions can have a preventive effect, reducing problems such as decreased functional independence, resulting from the death of their spouse (Onrust, Smit, Willemse, Bout, & Cuijpers (2008). However, despite the availability of multiple bereavement support interventions, consensus is lacking regarding the need for such interventions, as well as their efficacy (Genevro, Marshall, & The Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004). The purpose of this study was to summarize and evaluate bereavement support interventions utilized with newly widowed older women experiencing uncomplicated grief. The researcher conducted an integrative literature review, summarizing and evaluating 11 publications examining the effect of bereavement support interventions for newly widowed older women experiencing uncomplicated grief. Each stage of the review was guided by Whittenmore and Knaf's (2005) framework for conducting research reviews. This framework is derived from Cooper's earlier (1998) framework. Included study designs, interventions, outcomes, and populations varied widely. Although all studies demonstrated improvements in grief-related outcomes, only one (Yoo & Kang, 2006) demonstrated statistical significance of all major variables between interventions and control groups, while a second (Kang & Yoo, 2007) yielded mixed results, demonstrating statistical significance of only one of the two major variables between intervention and control groups. A statistically significant intervention impact on three of five major variables, measured over time, was reported in a third study (Stewart, et al., 2001). Findings demonstrated that while newly widowed older women experiencing uncomplicated grief may benefit from bereavement support interventions, lack of consensus regarding type of effective interventions and outcome measures continues. Researcher recommendations for future research included:

- 1) Evaluation of bereavement support outcomes over time
- 2) Replication studies comparing bereavement support outcomes in participants who seek out support versus those recruited to receive support
- 3) Evaluation of bereavement support outcomes in same gender support groups versus mixed gender groups.

Biography

Jeanne Pacheco is a doctoral student in Regis College's Doctor of Nursing Practice's program. She earned her Master of Science Degree in Nursing from the University of Massachusetts in 1992. Her doctoral project, *A Scholarly Practice Project: Promoting Healthy Bereavement in Newly Widowed Older Women in Assisted Living Facilities*, brings together her passion for working with an often underserved and underappreciated population and her belief in the power of education. Having spent almost three decades as a nurse and a nurse educator, Jeanne has spent her career putting her values into action. During her career as a nurse, her work has focused on in geriatrics, terminal illness, and bereavement support. This has provided her the opportunity to care for those who share their wisdom and experience with her while she offers her caring and expertise. Through these experiences, Jeanne has reflected on the importance of how to live one's life. She has spent a good part of her career passing this on to her students. She challenges them how to feel joy in what can be a draining profession. By helping students understand that healing others provides the opportunity to understand what is important in life, Jeanne always seeks to pass along not only knowledge, but also wisdom.

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