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Models and theories that can guide grief and bereavement information interventions: an information behaviour lens

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Abstract

Introduction. Information behaviour in grief, bereavement, death, dying and its influence on the development of information interventions is understudied. Although pragmatic and evidence-based practices work well, theoretical and conceptual models, research findings and theories should inform grief and bereavement information interventions developed by specialist counsellors. Extensive literature on death, dying, grief and bereavement counselling/therapy and information behaviour per se, does not address this need. This paper reports on work in progress exploring existing theories and models that might guide research.

Method. Scoping review of literature from applicable disciplines (health, social work, religion, psychology, library/information science) for theories/models reported in grief and bereavement counselling and bereavement information intervention design. The focus is on information behaviour and all related information activities.

Analysis. Two tables based on a content analysis that show theories/models that hold value for information interventions and studies of information behaviour.

Results. The analysis reveals a spectrum of theories including grief theory, grief stage theory, theory of motivated information management. Models for consideration include bereavement model, transtheoretical model (narratives), social interaction model.

Conclusion. Information behaviour research should continue to strive in conceptually and theoretically informing grief and bereavement information interventions, practices and work in grief and bereavement counselling.

Introduction

Grief and bereavement affect all people from all sectors of society and although many try to cope on their own, support and counselling through trained professionals in grief and bereavement counselling can ease the process, and adaptation needed to cope and make sense (Harris and Winokuer, 2019; Steffen et al., 2023). The impact of death and dying is even more prominent during times of pandemics, natural disasters and war (Chachar et al., 2021). Grief (i.e., process following loss e.g., of a person dying) and bereavement (a state of loss e.g., from death) are very complex with numerous factors influencing experiences, great differences in individual levels of coping and with no time limit (Worden, 2018). Sometimes grief escalates to prolonged, complicated or traumatic grief and in extreme cases to psychiatric care (Li et al., 2015); some situations are more unique e.g. dementia grief (Blandin and Pepin, 2017). Grief and bereavement also apply to other situations of loss e.g. divorce, losing a job or house or moving to another country as a refugee. This paper focuses on grief and bereavement related to the death of people.

Earlier information behaviour research addressed temporality (time), spatiality and space influences, multiplicity of complex contexts and the impact of progression in situations (i.e., situations-in-progress). The phenomenology of death, i.e., how it happened, influences information needs and behaviour during grief and bereavement (Fourie, 2020). There are many other influences. This paper will not consider these; the focus is on theories and models that might inform intervention research and that can inform practices of grief and bereavement counselling (Fraser et al., 2009). For intervention research you require knowledge of the problem, read work around the practices, but also understand the broader field.

Grief and bereavement counselling are offered by trained professionals/councillors/therapists, religious workers and volunteers. Globally many organisations specialise in such support, counselling and sometimes even education e.g.,

Grief Australia, Nova Scotia palliative care bereavement support program, St Francis Hospice and the Vereniging Leven met Dood in The Netherlands. Their programs are based on disciplinary training, practical guidelines and experience, evidence-based decisions and creativity. Many textbooks and practical guides are available (Coenen and Pimas, 2020; Worden, 2018). These programs rely strongly on components and activities associated with information behaviour such as information sources, information provision, information sharing and knowledge of what information grieving people need and how they seek information (Dias et al., 2019; Paun and Cothran, 2019). Information behaviour as the field of study that can inform such interventions are, however, seldom explicitly acknowledged.

Timely and appropriate information and support, based on knowledge of information needs and information behaviour can make a difference to quality of life, coping and making sense. There are many contexts where information behaviour is understudied... Grieving is an ongoing process that can benefit from more appropriate information support and understanding (Fourie, 2020).

A deep contextualised more holistic understanding of the complexities of information behaviour in grief and bereavement is required to fully benefit from information interventions integrated with other support (Fourie, 2020).

Grief and bereavement counselling and information behaviour can both inform each other; their models and theories can open new opportunities for interdisciplinary and intervention research. This short paper was inspired by a query from an organisation offering counselling to the bereaved; they wanted to know if there are more work similar to what the author discussed in an earlier paper (Fourie, 2020). The work of Kochen et al. (2020), Hutti and Limbo (2019), Stroebe (2001) and Supiano (2019) show that alignment with theories and models can support grief and bereavement counselling and information interventions. Some general discussions on

models and theories and textbooks can shed deeper light (Balk, 1996; Bath 2009; Brown, 2019; Fasse et al., 2014; Gillies and Neimeyer, 2006).

The question that guided this paper is thus:

Which models and theories regarding grief and bereavement (including counselling) research can guide information interventions and how can these inform information behaviour research related to grief and bereavement counselling?

This is a short paper reporting on work in progress. The clarification of core concepts, methodology followed, the analysis and findings, a matrix of theories and models, recommendations and a conclusion are presented.

Clarification of concepts

Bereavement and bereavement counselling

Bereavement refers to the state of loss; mostly when a loved one dies. A person in bereavement needs to adapt to the loss, recover and live in a new reality in which the deceased is absent, and where individuals learn to live without what they have lost (Medlineplus, 2020). 'Bereavement counselling refers to counselling offered to individuals who have suffered a loss, typically the death of a loved one, in order to help the bereaved through the process of mourning and recovery' ('Bereavement Counseling').

Grief and grief counselling

Grief follows the loss of something, most notably the loss of a person passing away. It is strongly related to death and dying. It is 'a natural multifaceted, multi-occurring response that individuals experience throughout their lives to a variety of losses, most notably the death of someone with whom a close bond of affection was shared such as a father grieving the loss of a child or a child grieving the loss of a parent' (Fourie, 2020 citing Aho et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015). It can become long and complicated (Mason and Tofthagen, 2019). The concept grief counselling is often used interchangeably with bereavement counselling.

It is 'a form of psychotherapy that aims to help people cope with the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and cognitive responses to loss. These experiences are commonly thought to be brought on by a loved person's death...' (Wikipedia; Worden, 2018).

Information behaviour

Information behaviour refers to all information-related activities and encounters, including information seeking, information searching, browsing, recognising and expressing information needs, information encountering, information avoidance, information processing, information sharing and information use (Julien and Fourie, 2014); the definition was developed from the work of Case, Given, Savolainen and Wilson.

Method

The paper is based on a scoping review of literature from applicable disciplines (health, social work, religion, psychology, library/information science) for theories and models reported in grief and bereavement counselling and bereavement information support and intervention design. The focus is on information behaviour and all related information activities. Although a wealth of literature on grief and bereavement is available from health, psychological, religious and social work sciences and adjacent fields (Coenen and Pimas, 2020; Harris and Winokuer, 2019; Steffen et al., 2023; Worden, 2018), grief and bereavement and related counselling and support are still understudied in terms of information behaviour. Some work from Library and Information Science that was published since 2020 include Abidin (2022), Conner et al. (2022), Dominguez-Rodriguez et al. (2023), Douglas et al. (2022), Hamdan and Sayyed (2022), Justice (2021), May (2023), Morley (2023), Poor et al. (2022), Pretorius et al. (2020), Sengupta and Tacheva (2021) and Choi et. al. (2023). The focus is on social media (Facebook, Instagram, online support, Internet searching), grief support for a colleague and a grief collection in a hospital library. The only two studies I could trace that is explicitly related to information behaviour are Zimmerman (2023) reporting on the needs of suicide survivors and Dinneen et al. (2024) that writes from the

perspective of information management. Earlier work by myself (Fourie, 2020), published in the open access journal, *Information Research*, provide more extensive background, explanations and references.

Many of the models in information behaviour might hold potential for information behaviour research in grief and bereavement counselling, but none are explicitly positioned as such. I thus moved to the literature of supporting disciplines to identify relevant theories and models. Databases searched include all the EbscoHost and Proquest databases to which the institutional Library subscribes (including Library and Information Science Abstracts [LISA], Library and Information Science Technology Abstracts [LISTA], Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect and Web of Science). The following terms/truncated terms had to appear in the title of articles/conference papers: grief, griev*, bereave*, bereavement in combination with theor*, model*. Only full text articles/conference papers available in English were selected for further analysis. No restriction was placed on the date of publication.

Qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) was applied to identify theories and models that could guide information interventions in grief and bereavement counselling as seen through an information behaviour lens. Titles and abstracts were analysed to identify theories and models that may hold value for work on information interventions and information behaviour research and the focus of where and how these were applied. In further work full-text papers will be analysed to identify constructs, components, activities, triggers and influences of information behaviour e.g. information needs, information activities, contexts, time, space.

Analysis and discussion

The content analysis focused only on titles and abstracts of documents. As shown in table 1, the theory that stood out most is the grief stage theory. Grief stage theory can inform work on time and temporality when studying contexts in information behaviour studies on grief and bereavement and it would be important to consider when planning information interventions for different stages of grief. Other theories mentioned in Table 1 address a variety of issues that would require a closer look when proceeding with the research. Such work needs to be assessed in detail as structure for what is presented in this paper. There are also more comprehensive discussions of theory and models in grief and bereavement that need to be considered (e.g., Bonanno, 2001).

Table 1 presents the theories holding the most potential for further exploration and intervention research specifically targeting information interventions approached from an information behaviour perspective. Some of the theories are based on activities that falls under information behaviour e.g. the sharing of memories (that might be interpreted as information) through therapeutic writing (Den Elzen, 2021) or forms of information that needs to be considered e.g. cues as mentioned by Boddez (2018) who also brings in knowledge and learning in a discussion on the application of conditioning theory. Other theories such as experiential theory based on the work of Kolb have featured in information behaviour research such as the work of Kuhlthau (1999) on the information search process. Some theories can be explored to determine how they can highlight triggers and influences of information behaviour. This is true for amongst other the attachment and emotional security theories. Theory of motivated information management (Droser, 2020) has been used in studies on information seeking.

Theory	Authors	Focus
Attachment theory	Field et al. (2005) Jacobs et al. (1987)	Continuation of bonds in bereavement Multiple dimensions of death
Conditioning theory	Boddez (2018)	Focus on absence
Dialogical self-theory	Den Elzen (2021)	Therapeutic writing and grief memoirs
Emotional security theory	Hardt et al. (2019)	Sibling bereavement
Experiential theory	Hogan et al. (1996)	Experiential theory of bereavement
Grief theory	Adolfsson and Larsson (2010) Granek (2010)	Swedish women's experiences after early miscarriage Evolution of grief theory in psychology
Grief stage theory	Bonanno and Boerner (2007) Cohen (2018). Daniel (2023) Holland and Neimeyer (2010) Maciejewski et al. (2007)	Discussion of the theory Music and Pink Floyd Persistence of the theory Grief among individuals bereaved by natural and violent cause Empirical examination
Linville's self-complexity theory	Meekings (2019)	Writing through loss
Mindfulness-to-meaning theory	Williams et al. (2021)	Posttraumatic growth in the context of grief
Personal construct theory of death and loss	Viney (1991)	Use in individually oriented grief therapy
Planned behaviour perspective	Bath (2009)	Prediction of social support for grieving persons
Psychodynamic theories	Berzoff (2003)	Application to grief and bereavement
Relational theory of grief	Strawn (2005)	Paradox of loss
Ritual theory	Bothe-Smith and Dreyer (2014)	Pastoral care and grief
Self-determination theory	Lumb et al. (2017)	Posttraumatic growth and bereavement
Self-compassion theoretical model	Zhang et al. (2023)	Intervention for caregivers of children in parentally bereaved families
Theory of grief recovery (TOGR)	Nolan and Hallam (2019)	Paradigm toward our understanding of grief and loss
Theory of motivated information management	Droser (2020)	Information seeking and grief in bereaved emerging adults
Turbulence theory	Tian and Solomon (2020)	Women's grief following miscarriage

Unifying theory	Hill et al. (2019)	Belongingness and suicide ideation in bereaved adolescents
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Table 1. Theories holding the most potential for further exploration in intersecting information behaviour and grief and bereavement counselling and intervention research

Both theories and models can inform and guide research (Given et al., 2023). That applies for research in information behaviour as well as research on grief and bereavement.

Table 2 presents the models from grief and bereavement literature holding the most

potential for further exploration and information intervention research from information behaviour perspectives. Models that stood out are the dual process model and the two-track model of bereavement. Other models cover a variety of aspects that require further investigation.

Model	Authors	Focus
Acceptance-disclosure model of LGBT	Bristowe et al. (2023)	LGBT and bereavement
Adaptive model of grief	Gamino et al. (2000)	A grief study working towards an adaptive model of grief
Attachment and loss (models) Attachment path model Attachment-based model	Fraley and Bonanno (2004) Kho et al. (2015) Shear et al. (2007)	Comparing three models with relation to attachment-related avoidance and adaptation to bereavement Relationships and grief in older adults Complicated grief including the role of avoidance
ATTEND Model	Thieleman et al. (2014)	Traumatic bereavement and mindfulness
Bereavement model	Alaszewski et al. (2004)	Stroke rehabilitation
Bronfenbrenner bioecological model	Chachar et al. (2021)	Death and grief among children during the COVID-19 pandemic
Calvary model of non-abandonment	Schachter and Georgopoulos (2010)	Facilitation of open communication in bereavement.
Care model	Gilbert et al. (2021)	Model of employee bereavement support
Cognitive attachment model	MacCallum and Bryant (2013)	Integration of attachments, memory and identity
Cognitive behaviour couple therapy-REBT model	Malkinson and Brask-Rustad (2013)	Traumatic bereavement
Cognitive-constructivist model	Neimeyer (2006)	Complicated grief and the reconstruction of meaning:
Cross-cultural model of grief	Klass (1999)	A review
Five-factor model	Goetter et al. (2019)	Bereaved adults with and without complicated grief

Interpersonal neurobiological-informed treatment model	Crenshaw (2006)	Childhood traumatic grief
Dual process model	Bennett et al. (2010) Calabria and Cheswick (2023) Cantwell-Bartl (2018) Caserta and Lund (2007) Chen et al. (2019) Fasse and Zech (2016) Fiore (2021) Green et al. (2021) Lund et al. (2010) McKiernan et al. (2018) McManus et al. (2018) Richardson (2010) Stroebe and Schut (1999) Yu, et al. (2022)	Coping with bereavement Cognitive and behavioural strategies to support a man with mild-moderate learning disabilities Parents whose child has a constant life-threatening disability Widowed life and coping with bereavement Mothers coping with bereavement in the 2008 China earthquake Subjective experiences of bereaved spouses Systematic review Art therapy with grieving children Experiences and early coping of bereaved spouses and partners Young people's relationship breakups Restoration and loss after disaster Length of caregiving and well-being among older widowers Coping with bereavement: rationale and description of the model COVID-19 bereaved Individuals
Family grief therapy model	Kissane et al. (1998)	Promoting healthy family functioning during palliative care and bereavement
Grief reaction model	Tatsuno et al. (2012)	Families who experienced acute bereavement in Japan
Heuristic model	Horacek (1995)	Grief after high-grief deaths
Health professionals grieving process model	Papadatou (2000) Redinbaugh (2001)	Health professionals' grieving process Health care professionals' grief: a model based on occupational style and coping
Integrated explanatory model	Chow (2010)	Anticipatory anniversary effects
Integrated process/coping model	Guldin and Leget (2023) Stroebe and Schut (2015)	An interprofessional attempt to understand loss and grief Family matters in bereavement
Integrative model of grief	Moos (1995)	Modelling grief
Irish model of bereavement support	Walsh et al. (2008)	Bereavement support in an acute hospital
Latent growth mixture model	Smith and Ehlers (2020)	Cognitive predictors of grief trajectories in the first months of loss
Loss-grief addiction model	Beechem et al. (1996)	Loss, grief and addiction

Meaning making model	Wortmann and Park (2009)	Religion/spirituality and change in meaning after bereavement
Mediational model	Currier et al. (2006). Milman et al. (2019) Yu et al. (2016)	Sense-making, grief, and the experience of violent loss Prolonged grief and the disruption of meaning Continuing bonds
Mindfulness-based bereavement care model	Cacciatore and Flint (2012)	Bereavement and care
Model of adjustment	Williams and Polak (1979)	Primary prevention - in acute grief
Model(s) of linear and cyclical grief	Worthington (1994)	Different approaches to different experiences
Model for understanding	Batten and Oltjenbruns (1999)	Adolescent sibling bereavement as a catalyst for spiritual development
Multidimensional model of related factors	Albuquerque et al. (2018) Kaplow et al. (2013)	Posttraumatic growth in bereaved parents Exploring the effects of deployment, reintegration and death on military youth and children
Parental grief model	Klass and Marwit (1988)	An attempt to develop a parental grief model
Process based model	Yehene et al. (2021)	Caregivers' grief in acquired non-death interpersonal loss
Reflective self (model)	Nerken (1993)	Loss resolution and growth
Self-compassion model for intervention	Zhang et al. (2023)	Caregivers of children in parentally bereaved families
Process model of stigmatised loss	Minton et al. (2023)	Identity-threatened experiences of bereaved mothers
Social interaction model	Baddeley and Singer (2009)	Bereavement narrative disclosure
Social-ecological model	Fisk (2023)	Complexity and embeddedness of grief
Support group model	Jordan and Ware (1997)	Adults grieving the death of a parent
Transtheoretical model (narratives)	Ando et al. (2014) Calderwood (2011)	Bereaved family members in the bereavement life review Adapting the model to the bereavement process
Two-track model of bereavement	Malkinson et al. (2006) Manevich et al. (2023) McDuffie et al. (2022) Malkinson et al. (2006) Rubin et al. (2017) Rubin (1999) Rubin et al. (2021)	Therapeutic issues and the relationship to the deceased Risk and resilience and dementia grief among spouses of people living with cognitive decline African American adults Therapeutic issues and the relationship to the deceased Bereavement and traumatic bereavement Overview, retrospect and prospect. Dementia grief (TTM-DG): continuing bond in sickness and in death

	Rubin and Shechory-Stahl (2012)	Continuing bonds of bereaved parents: a ten-year follow-up study
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Table 2. Models holding the most potential for further exploration in intersecting information behaviour and grief and bereavement counselling and intervention research

Results and recommendations

Tables 1 and 2 show a spectrum of theories and models that need to be mapped to theories and models in the field of information behaviour and to information activities that need to be studied e.g. recognition of information needs, information sharing – the issues that need to be addressed in grief and bereavement interventions. It is evident that information processing and progress in the process of grieving are very important. Further in-depth work can pave the way for both theoretical/conceptual development of models to reflect information behaviour in the processes of grief and bereavement counselling

as well as intervention research with organisations involved in grief and bereavement counselling.

Conclusion

Information behaviour research should continue to strive in conceptually and theoretically informing grief and bereavement information interventions, practices and work in grief and bereavement counselling. An understanding of how the theories and models reported in grief and bereavement counselling, interventions and research can be used is, however, essential.

About the author

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Websites

Grief Australia (<https://www.grief.org.au/ga/ga/Support/Counselling.aspx>)

Novia Scotia palliative care bereavement support program (<https://www.nshealth.ca/clinics-programs-and-services/palliative-care-bereavement-program>)

St Francis Hospice Dublin (<https://www.sfh.ie/>)

Vereniging Leven met Dood (www.vereniginglecenenmetdood.nl)