Loss, Grief, and Domestic Violence

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Usually when society thinks of grief, it is thought of revolving around the death of a loved one… a physical being...a physical loss

...as we have come to experience so many other types of loss in our lives, society has begun to understand grief differently through the recognition of losses that are not death related...

survivors of domestic violence are grieving for multiple losses, many of which still go unrecognized and unacknowledged.
Understanding Loss, Grief, and Bereavement
What are the differences between...

- ...Loss
- ...Bereavement
- Grief
- Mourning...?
Loss and Bereavement

- Bereavement
  - The actual event of a significant loss

- Loss
  - Death
  - Divorce
  - Separation
  - End of Significant Relationships
  - Employment Loss
  - Independence
  - Property Loss
  - Miscarriage
  - Infertility
  - Adoption
Grief

- Grief is the actual expression of the loss
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Behavioral
  - Psychological/Cognitive

“First we are bereaved, then we grieve…”
Mourning

- The more or less conventional institutionalized expressions of grief (Doka, 2002 as defined by Maris)

- Observable expression of grief (Doka, 2002 as defined by Parkes and Weiss)

- Cultural or public displays of grief (i.e., viewings, memorials, funerals, obituaries, clothing worn, etc.)
Mourning consists of social expectations as well as cultural definitions and rules that tell us how important our loss is whether we have the right to grieve; and if so, how much, how long, and in what ways we can and should do this.” (Doka, 2002)
Mourning

- Mourning
  - The process by which we integrate loss and grief into our lives
    - Adaptation
    - Mobilization
    - Reintegration
    - Finding Meaning

The process of mourning may be influenced or guided by cultures, religions, society, and rituals.
Exploring Grief
Reactions to Grief

- **Emotional Reactions**
  - Numbness
  - Shock
  - Disbelief and Denial
  - Sadness
  - Guilt
  - Yearning
  - Despair
  - Hopelessness
  - Feeling lost
  - Anger
  - Bitterness
  - Relief

- **Physical Reactions**
  - Deep sighing
  - Weakness and fatigue
  - Rapid heartbeat
  - Increased blood pressure
  - Decrease in activity
  - Changes in sleeping patterns
  - Neglect of self care
  - Increased sensory awareness
  - Decreased immune system
  - Weight and appetite changes
  - Muscular tension
  - Nausea or vomiting
Reactions to Grief

**Cognitive Reactions**
- Changes in dream patterns
- Flashbacks
- Continuous thoughts/memories
- Intrusive thoughts/memories
- Triggers that cause emotional, behavioral, or physical reactions
- Spiritual Conflicts
- Startle reactions
- Absentmindedness
- “Lost” portions of times/events
- Dissociation

**Behavioral Reactions**
- Blaming others
- Apathetic regarding activities
- Preoccupied
- Crying
- Seeking solitude
- Seeking Forgiveness
- Detachment
- Isolation
- Disorientation
- Withdraw from family/friends
- Unable to concentrate
Understanding Domestic Violence
What is domestic violence?

- Defined as...
  - A pattern of behaviors utilized to obtain control and domination over an intimate partner or family member (i.e., over another person)
    - Assaultive
    - Coercive
    - Controlling
    - Manipulation
Domestic Violence

- Legally defined as... FS 741.28(1)
  - Any abusive of one family member or household member by another family or household member
    - Persons related by blood or through marriage
    - Persons who share a child in common
    - Persons who reside together, or who have resided together in the past, as a family unit
No Matter What You Call It, It’s All Abuse

- Family Violence
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Domestic Violence
- Dating Violence
- Relationship Violence
Dynamics within Domestic Violence

- Power
- Control
- Domination
- Manipulation
- Coercion
- Verbal
- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Financial/Economic
Victim Reactions
Reactions to Victimization

- Changes in eating patterns
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Body fatigue/Exhaustion
- Crying
- Changes in thinking patterns
- Body fatigue
- Numbness
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Inability to concentrate
- Physical shock
- Emotional shock
- Spiritual Conflicts
- “Cycling” of emotions
- Changes in interpersonal relationships
- Triggers that send the body into emotional or physical reactions
Grief and Domestic Violence

- Emotional Responses
- Physical Distress
- Cognitive Reframing
- Conditioning/Conditioned Responses
- Behavioral Adjustments
  - Coping Skills
  - Defense Mechanisms
  - Adaptive or Maladaptive
Statistical Overview of Domestic Violence
In 2006, crimes by intimate partners accounted for 12% of all violent crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007)

Approximately 1 in 5 high school girls has reported being abused by a boyfriend (Silverman, et al., 2001)
25% of women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives (Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.fcadv.org/statistics)

In 2006, lesbians, gay, bisexual, or transgender people experienced 3,534 incidents of domestic violence (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program, 2007)
One study found that women who had experienced any type of personal violence, even when the last episode was 14–30 years ago, reported a greater number of chronic physical symptoms than those who had not been abused.

- The risk of suffering from 6 or more chronic physical symptoms increased with the number of forms of violence experienced (Nicolaidis, et al., 2004)
50% of all stalking cases involve current or previous intimate partners (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998)

The prevalence of anxiety, stalking, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than the general population (Blaauw, 2002)
In 2006, child protective services found approximately 905,000 children to be victims of child abuse or neglect (Child Maltreatment, 2008)

The most significant predictor of whether or not a battered woman will physically abuse her children is having been physically abused by her own mother, not whether she has been battered by her partner (Coohey, 2004)
Of the alleged perpetrators of elder abuse in 2004, 33% percent were adult children; 22% were other family members; and 11% were spouses or intimate partners; the remaining had unknown relationships (Teaster et al., 2004)
Loss, Grief, and Domestic Violence
What losses do domestic violence victims experience?

For what might they be grieving??
Losses which are Grieved

Independence
Security
Intimate Relationship
Support of Family and Friends
Social Networks
Hope
Belief Systems
Trust
The Happy Ending
Losses which are Grieved

The parent they were supposed to be
The life your children were supposed to live
The future that you will have in an abusive relationship
The future you expected to have
The way it was
The way you wish it had been
Losses which are Grieved

The person you thought they were
The person you expected them to be
The relationship you deserved to have
The life you were supposed to lead
The person that you were before the abuse
The person you wish you had been the first time the abuse happened
Losses which are Grieved

- Actual victimization event and all that may have come after that –
  
  *The first time…*
  
  *The next time…*
  
  *The last time…*
  
  *The next time after the last time…*
  
  *When you stay…*
  
  *When you leave…*
Disenfranchised Grief
Disenfranchised Grief

Grief which is:
- Not openly acknowledged
- Not socially validated
- Not publicly observed

The person has no socially accorded right to grieve that loss or to mourn in that particular way.
Typologies of Disenfranchised Grief

- Lack of recognition of the relationship
- Lack of acknowledgement of the loss
- Exclusion of the griever
- Circumstances of the death/loss
- Ways individuals grieve
Stages of Grief

The Kubler-Ross Model
First Stage: Denial and Isolation

- Shock, disbelief, disorientation
- Minimizes the situation
- Deflects questions
- Other topics are weighted with greater importance and concern
- Withdraws /Isolates
- Does not actively utilize support system
- Lacks self-empathy
- Perception of wellness, happiness, confidence, etc.
Second Stage: Anger

- “Anger, rage, envy, resentment”
- “Why me?”
- Adrenaline/Energy
  - Motivation
- Displacement
- Grievances
- Healthy expression and outlets
  - Boundaries
  - Assertiveness
Third Stage: Bargaining

- In grief:
  - A way to postpone
  - Often made with “God”

- In victims of domestic violence dealing with grief:
  - Impedes on security
  - Provides an opportunity to elicit information about how the client may have wished to change
Fourth Stage: Depression

- Sadness
- When the greatness of the loss sinks in
- “Depression is anger turned inwards”
- Secondary victimizations
Fifth Stage: Acceptance

- Not “happiness”
- Acknowledgement/Recognition
- Incorporation into life experiences and life story
- Finding meaning
- Integration of meaning
Other Stages
Guilt

- Self-blame
- Shame
- Inward expressions

“Along with guilt, in came her friends shame and embarrassment”
Relief

- Peace
- Joy
- Respite
- Liberation
Incorporating Grief Work into Crisis Response and Advocacy
What are the goals of advocacy?

What are the goals of crisis intervention?
What is Grief Work?

- Specific steps which must be taken if a person is to be freed from the attachment to the [loss] (Lindemann)

- The psychological process of adjustment to the loss (Maris)

- The process of grieving is the reconstruction of meaning (Neimeyer)

- Getting in touch with and expressing the natural emotions (Kubler-Ross)
What outlets do domestic violence victims have to express their grief?
Interventions
• Client Directed
• Facilitated and supported by advocate
• Interventions for healing
• Don’t idolize the violence or abusive relationship
• Recognize and acknowledge the loss
Rituals

- Rituals of Continuity
  - Ongoing presence of the loss

- Rituals of Transition
  - Mark or change movement since the loss

- Rituals of Reconciliation
  - Complete unfinished business or offer/accept forgiveness*

- Rituals of Affirmation
  - Affirm the loss, recognize lessons learned in the experience
Rituals

- Allow clients to carefully consider the implications of the actions that are about to be undertaken
- Offer options
- Empower the client to make choices
- Thoroughly process the ritual once it is complete
- Effective rituals tend to have visible elements that also have symbolic significance
- Should not intrude or complicate the grieving process
Rituals and Domestic Violence

- Do not allow the client (or yourself) end in a position where the violence or the relationship becomes idolized

- Stay realistic about the violence, focus on the losses incurred
  - And how the grief relates to those losses
  - This may include the experience of abuse
  - How the violence impacts the grieving process

- Use ritual as a method for acknowledging and recognizing the grief experience
• Write an obituary/eulogy for...

• Write a letter of ____ to ____....(earlier self, children, family, friends – whatever is reoccurring in the client’s sessions)

• Shred, burn afterwards as a way of letting go

• Draw a headstone

• Write a letter to the future self

• Empty Chair exercise

Rituals
• Provide psychoeducational sessions
• Facilitate the expression of emotions related to the losses
  • Validate and Normalize Reactions
• Allow clients to explore the effects of the change on their own sense of self and their beliefs
  • Identify adaptive and maladaptive coping skills
• Legitimizing the grief process/role of the griever
• Reviewing and creating support system
• Using rituals as interventions for healing
• Allow clients to develop their own rituals for acknowledging the loss
• Help clients realistically plan for the future
• Incorporate the topic of loss, grief, grief work, and mourning
  • Have group create a ritual/expression of their grief work
  • Incorporate both grief and disenfranchised grief
What interventions would you do?

What have you done in the past that has been effective?
Children and Teenagers
Grieving Among the Living
Death

NASH
Natural, Accidental, Suicide, Homicide
The Ultimate Ending

- Homicide
- The loss of a life
- A bereaved family
- Grief over the life of a loved one
- Mourning the life lived in violence, the life that should have been, and the life lost through domestic violence
Questions
References

- Statistical Overview
  - Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.fcadv.org/statistics
  - Tjaden, Patricia & Thoennes, Nancy (1998) “Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey”
References

- **Disenfranchised Grief**

- **Mourning**

- **Stages of Grief**

- **Grief Work**