Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the most current research findings on widowed parenthood;
2. Describe the four broad challenges facing widowed parents;
3. Define specific bereavement needs of these parents; and
4. Discuss interventions to support widowed parents and their families.

Why Widowed Parents?
Widowed Parenthood
Not Uncommon

• In U.S., ~200,000 persons between 25-60 die each year
• Many leave behind spouses and young children
• Military rates

Widowed Parenthood
Vulnerable Population

• Younger widows/widowers have higher depression and grief (Zisook et al., 1993)
• Disrupted developmental trajectories
• Isolated from peers (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012)

Widowed Parenthood
Impact on Family

• Parents assume responsibility for children's well-being
• Poorer outcomes for children (Brent et al., 2015; Tyrka et al., 2008)
• Parent psychological functioning affects children's coping (Bandler et al., 2015)
The Research on Widowed Parenthood

Research
• Overall, very few studies have focused on widowed parents
• Family Bereavement Program
  • Sandler and colleagues at Arizona State University
  • Intervention-based research
  • Relationship between lower psych distress in parents and better/healthier parenting practices

Research Findings – UNC Studies
• Widowed fathers; children at home; death due to cancer
• Initial Findings (Park et al., 2015; Yopp et al., 2015)
  • Elevated depression
  • Elevated grief
  • High parenting-related stress
  • Reported meeting parenting expectations
Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont’d.)

• Assessed how fathers adapted over the first two years
  • Total number of fathers: 252
  • Age: 46 years
  • Race: 89% Caucasian
  • Education: 74% college degrees
  • Income: 77% more than $50,000/year

Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont’d.)

Depression

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Research Findings – UNC Studies (cont’d.)

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• Linear regression modeling for CES-D and TRIG-B
• Significantly correlated at nearly all time intervals:
  • Widowed Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale
  • Kansas Parenting Satisfaction Scale
  • Parenting Adaptation Scale
  • TRIG-A

Making Sense of What We Know
**Conceptualization**

- Widowed parents prioritize parenting responsibilities over personal well-being
- Understandable, but comes with a cost
- Reasons why widowed parents may remain distressed longer than non-parents who are grieving a loss

**Four Broad Challenges of Widowed Parenthood**

- Grieving the loss of a spouse/partner
- Helping children grieve the death of a parent
- Adapting to sole parenthood and household management
- Moving forward (dating, etc.)

**Counseling Widowed Parents**
**Individual Counseling**

- Recognize unique aspects of their situation
  - Youth; not the same as divorced parents
- Promote child-centered parenting approach
  - Balances emotional warmth with structure, consistent discipline
- Encourage realistic expectations
  - Concept of the “Good Enough Parent”

**Individual Counseling**

- Promote self-care
  - Important to prioritize self, not just children
- **Outdated**: the Five Stages of Grief model
  - Dr. Kübler-Ross’ initial work (1969) was based on clinical observations of terminally-ill patients
  - Grief is individualized, not linear, much more than five emotions

**A Framework for Understanding Grief**
The Dual Process of Coping with Bereavement

- Margaret Stroebe and Hank Schut (1999; 2010)
- Not prescriptive of emotions, sequence, or timeframe
- Suitable for any bereaved person
  - An especially good fit for widowed parents

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyOVKL2pEs#action=share

Support Group

- Benefits for parents:
  - Connect with others in similar circumstances
  - Receive support and guidance from peers
  - Help others by sharing their own experiences
  - Appreciate that many experiences and stressors are "normal"
  - Learn from group facilitators
Support Group

- The UNC Approach:
  - Separate groups for mothers and fathers
  - Provide childcare, dinner
  - Encourage discussion; no agenda for meetings
  - Guided by DPM
  - Meet on a monthly basis; staggered entry/exit ramps

Learn more at
www.widowedparent.org

Questions?

Justin M. Yopp, PhD
Clinical Psychologist / Associate Professor
Co-Leader, Widowed Parent Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Moderated by Chantel Dooley, MA, PhD candidate
Director, TAPS Impact Assessment
About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.

Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

• April 25—Double Whammy: Coping with the Death of a Spouse While Parenting a Grieving Child
  Presenter: Justin M. Yopp, PhD and Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC

• June 20-21—Helping Individuals and Families Coping with Grief: Best Practices for Bereavement Professionals
  Presenter: Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv

Visit taps.org/institute to learn more and RSVP!