Childhood Bereavement: Understanding Prevalence by Cause of Death

October 27, 2022
Learning Objectives

• Quantify national differences in U.S. childhood bereavement rates based on decedent’s cause of death

• Understand year-to-year trends in childhood bereavement by causes of death most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

• Identify opportunities for collaboration and advocacy as well as implications for service provision and supports for grieving children
The CBEM is an accessible public health tool that approximates the prevalence of childhood bereavement in the U.S.
2022 National CBEM Projected Prevalence

1 in 13 children in the U.S. will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18

7.7% ~ 5.6M children will be bereaved by age 18

& More than Doubles 13.9M youth will be bereaved by age 25
2022 State CBEM Projected Prevalence

California

LOWEST concentration
5.9%

West Virginia

HIGHEST concentration
12.4%

KEY

5.9-7.5% 7.6-9.2% 9.3-10.8% 10.9-12.4%

*Bereavement due to parent or sibling death by age 18
The **CURRENT** CBEM approximates the number and percentage of youth who **HAVE EXPERIENCED** bereavement.

The **PROJECTED** CBEM approximates the number and percentage of youth who **WILL EXPERIENCE** or **Parent** bereavement.

**Source of Bereavement**
- Death of Sibling
- Death of Parent
- Death of Sibling or Parent

**Geography**
- National
- State
- County

**Ages**
- Birth to 18
- Birth to 25

**Key Topics**
- Rural-Urban 2018
- Substance Related 2019
- Race and Ethnicity 2021
- Cause of Death 2022

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Why is cause of death important?

Children grieving a traumatic or stigmatized death, such as suicide, homicide, or drug overdose, may have more complex reactions.

Children grieving a death due to a less common cause, such as childhood leukemia or Parkinson’s disease, may feel more isolated and misunderstood.

Cause of death varies significantly by age of the deceased. For example, deaths in infancy account for a large portion of sibling bereavement while medical crises and chronic illnesses are less common.

Childhood bereavement is best understood when contextualized within systems of care that impact the lives of children, families, and communities. Examining leading causes of death can identify opportunities for collaboration and advocacy.
The **PROJECTED** CBEM approximates the number and percentage of youth who **WILL EXPERIENCE** bereavement.
New Indicator: Percent of Bereaved Children

\[
\frac{\text{Number of children who will be bereaved due to a specific cause}}{\text{Total number of children who will be bereaved}} = \%
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## U.S. Projected Childhood Bereavement by Cause of Death of a Parent by Age 18

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<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Number of Bereaved Children</th>
<th>Percentage of All Bereaved Children</th>
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<td>Accidents</td>
<td>1,534,000</td>
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Children Bereaved Due to Parent Death by Age 18

Grief following an accident is three times more common than any other cause.
Is this what you see in your community?
Children Bereaved Due to **Parent** Death by Age 18

$2^x$ Grieving a death by suicide is roughly two times more common than homicide.
Children Bereaved Due to Parent Death by Age 18

Nearly half will grieve a non-illness related death loss (e.g., accidents, homicide, suicide).
Children Bereaved Due to **Parent** Death by Age 18

The top five leading causes of death account for nearly three-fourths of bereavement. This excludes deaths due to COVID-19.
U.S. Projected Childhood Bereavement by Cause of Death of a Sibling by Age 18

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<td>291,000</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
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<td>Accidents</td>
<td>145,000</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
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<td>15.1%</td>
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Children Bereaved Due to **Sibling** Death by Age 18

Nearly half will grieve a death related to birth defects, such as genetic conditions, or conditions related to birth, like preterm birth. In these situations, the deceased sibling is typically under two years of age.
More than 85,000 children will grieve a homicide or suicide death loss. Combined, these causes account for nearly 1 in 10 bereaved children.
Children Bereaved Due to Sibling Death by Age 18

About 3 in 10 bereaved children will grieve deaths by other causes – a category comprised of more than 100 causes of death.
Children Bereaved Due to Sibling Death by Age 18

Sibling bereavement before age 18 is much less prevalent than experiencing the death of a parent – about one-fifth the size – leading to isolation and loneliness.
Think about the family you considered at the start of the presentation. Can you see the family through the lens of this data?
Partnership leads to progress

- American Cancer Society
- American Heart Association
- National Council for Suicide Prevention
- March of Dimes
- National Domestic Violence Hotline
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- Partnership to End Addiction
While childhood bereavement is not unique to the pandemic, the significant increase in bereavement due to the pandemic is unique.

Children bereaved due to pandemic-related deaths may experience stigma based on where, when, and how the death occurred.

Isolation and disruption created by COVID-19 safety measures affected how children grieve, such as interruptions or adaptations made to mourning rituals and practices.
### Model Results

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### Source of Bereavement

- **Death of Parent**

### Geography

- **National**

### Ages

- **Birth to 18**

### Key Topics

- **Cause of Death 2022**

**SNAPSHOT** analyses use data inputs from a **select timeframe**.
Why focus on parent death only?

- Children are three to five times more likely to experience the death of a parent in childhood than the death of a sibling.

- COVID-19 deaths for children under age 18 are rare: there were 141 in 2020.
2020 Landscape of childhood bereavement

Children Bereaved due to a Parent death Any Cause

Annual Average number of bereaved children, 2016-2019

262,300

25% increase

327,600
New Indicator: Percent of Newly Bereaved Children

\[
\text{Number of children who were newly bereaved due to a specific cause} \quad \frac{=} {\text{Total number of children who were newly bereaved}} \times 100\%
\]
2020 Landscape of childhood bereavement

- 22% Accidental drug overdose
- 4% Homicide by gunshot
- 5% COVID-19
- All other causes of death 69%
2020 Landscape of childhood bereavement

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Accidental drug overdoses

Children Newly Bereaved due to a Parent death from an Accidental Drug Overdose
Accidental drug overdoses

1 in 5 children newly bereaved by the death of a parent in 2020 experienced an accidental overdose death.
Homicide by gunshot

Children Newly Bereaved due to Parent death from a homicide by gunshot*

*Homicide by gunshot is relatively rare, accounting for 4% of childhood bereavement in 2020.
SNAPSHOT analyses use data inputs from a select timeframe

2020 to August 2022
*Parent death from COVID-19 is relatively rare, accounting for 5% of childhood bereavement in 2020.*
Putting the Pandemic in Perspective

- Average life expectancy in the U.S. fell sharply in 2020 and 2021, resulting in the largest two-year decline since the early 1920's.

- While COVID-19-related bereavement dominated news cycles, pandemic stress and isolation contributed to increased mortality in other causes of death that drove up childhood bereavement.

- Millions of children were bereaved before COVID-19. The pandemic elevated the topic like never before. Childhood bereavement will continue long after the pandemic fades. We must ensure our response outlives the pandemic.

- As a nation, our approach to addressing the pandemic must include services and support for all grieving children.
Making a Difference

GRIEF-RELATED ADVERSITY
Issues at home, financial strain, death of an important figure, move/loss of community, mental health concerns

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT
Good health, strong relationships, school success, job stability, self-sufficiency

DISRUPTED DEVELOPMENT
Mental health concerns, relationship difficulties, academic problems, reduced resilience/self-esteem, early mortality

GRIEF CARE PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Caring community, positive role models, healthy coping skills, peer support, encouraging educators
Questions
thank you!