

Half of the 100,000 predictable deaths each year have regretful outcomes*

The proportion of predictable deaths with a regretful outcome* has been estimated by The Violet Initiative, using a combination of anecdotal evidence drawing on The Violet Initiative's (TVI) 25 years of insight & experience working with caregivers & families in combination with available research.

This estimate relates to the (retrospective) view that caregivers have, following the experience of caring for someone through the last stages of life into bereavement. Regret being defined as “involving painful thoughts and feelings about past actions and how one could have achieved a better outcome” (Roese 2009). The importance of addressing regret is supported by a number of studies that have found that bereavement related-regrets to be a robust predictor of intensified grieving and other mental health outcomes (Bonanno, Wortman, & Nesse, 2004; Holland et al., 2014; Torges, Stewart, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2008).

In consideration of the prevalence of the regret experienced by an individual caring for a loved one and death related events, the broader concept of guilt needs to be recognised as regret together with self-blame: a sense of culpability due to failure to live up to standards of the deceased or one's self (Field 2001), form two of most-frequently identified manifestations of guilt as described by Stroebe et. al. (2014).

Guilt in the bereavement context has been defined as “a remorseful emotional reaction in bereavement, with recognition of having failed to live up to one's own inner standards and expectations in relationship to the deceased and/or the death” (Li 2014). The feeling of not living up to one's own standards and the inability to meet expectations related to the death and the death related experience forms the basis for the TVI regret gap concept that draws on the Calman Gap theory.

In their systematic review, Stroebe et al. (2014) found that the prevalence of guilt varied however the mean ranged between 30% and 60%. Applying this range together with anecdotal evidence obtained from over 25 years of experience working with caregivers & families TVI estimates that the prevalence of guilt and related regret and self-blame, collectively expressed as the regret that is experienced by Australian caregivers at 50 percent.

References

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