



PRISON SERVICE
JOURNAL

May 2021 No 254

Bereavement Behind Bars: Prison and the Grieving Process

Dr Katie Hunt is Lecturer in Law at University of Lincoln

Prisoners experience bereavement at a much higher rate than the general population and are likely to have suffered a 'catalogue of losses'¹ both prior to and as part of their sentence.² Bereavements and other traumas, including imprisonment, typically trigger a grief response which, if not acknowledged and supported, can lead to disenfranchised grief.³ Disenfranchised grief (on which see more below) refers to a hidden sorrow arising from a loss that is not acknowledged by society. The griever or their loss may not be validated by those around them. Feelings of mourning are therefore compounded by a sense of alienation and wrongness, a sense that we are alone and unsupported in our suffering, and perhaps ought not to feel as we do. This can have severe mental and physical health consequences and can impact on reoffending risk.⁴ Despite this, there are very few services targeted towards helping inmates with grief, compared to, say, rehabilitation programmes for addiction, domestic violence, or offending behaviour.

Death does not occur in a vacuum, but in a social framework that can determine the way a mourner experiences and navigates their loss.⁵ Over the past century, we have significantly expanded our understanding of the way people respond to the death of a loved one, but the loss is not always considered in context.⁶ This article demonstrates that the prison environment is not conducive to healthy mourning, and employs J. William Worden's 'tasks of mourning'⁷ and Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut's 'dual process

model'⁸ to show how the prison environment obstructs the grief process. It discusses the consequences of disenfranchised grief in prison, both for offenders themselves and their communities, demonstrating the need for sound pastoral care for people who are bereaved behind bars.

These findings come from a larger empirical, qualitative study on inequalities in access to prison chaplaincy and pastoral care. Data collection comprised of interviews and focus groups, and took place from March 2017 to October 2018. The 21 participants were prison chaplains, pastoral carers, bereavement counsellors and criminal justice professionals. Interviews were conducted on the telephone, by Skype through email and in person, including on-site during field visits to adult male prisons.

Bereavement Behind Bars

The contemporary English prison is an extraordinarily demanding environment in which to live and work, and the plethora of practical, emotional and social challenges facing prisoners is well documented.⁹ Overcrowding, underfunding and staff reductions leave institutions ill equipped to meet the complex mental and physical health needs of the people they confine.¹⁰ Offenders confront a multitude of obstacles that limit them in every way, from higher aspirations of personal growth and fulfilment to the most basic human necessities of hygiene, safety and nourishment. My interviewees were unanimous in their view that this high-stimulus environment exacerbates mental illness.

1. Vaswani, N. (2015) 'A catalogue of losses: Implications for the care and reintegration of young men in custody', *Prison Service Journal*, 220
2. Maschi, T., Gibson, S., Zgoba, KM. & Morgen, K. (2011) 'Trauma and life event stressors among young and older adult prisoners', *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 17(2)
3. Doka, KJ. (1989) *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing the Hidden Sorrow*. Lexington Books, New York
4. Wilson, M. (2010) "'This is not just about death – it's about how we deal with the rest of our lives": Coping with bereavement in prison', *Prison Service Journal*, 190
5. Lillie, AK., Corcoran, M., Hunt, K., Wrigley, A. & Read, S. (2018) 'Encountering offenders in community palliative care settings: challenges for care provision', *International Journal of Palliative Nursing*, 24(8)
6. Rees, D. (1997) *Death and Bereavement: The Psychological, Religious and Cultural Interfaces*. London: Whurr
7. Worden, JW. (2009) *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 4th edn. Springer, New York
8. Stroebe, M. & Schut, H. (1999) 'The dual process model of coping with bereavement: rationale and description', *Death Studies*, 23(3)
9. Prison Reform Trust (2017) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile: Autumn 2017*. London: Prison Reform Trust. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Autumn%202017%20factfile.pdf>
10. Indeed, staff shortages have led to a serious deterioration in standards in prisons and the subsequent management and support of bereaved prisoners (Wilson, M., Johnston, H. & Walker, L. (2020). "'It was like an animal in pain": Institutional thoughtlessness and bereavement in prison', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*).

It is a psychologically desperate place to be [...] If you have minor psych problems, you'll have bigger ones. — Participant 7, prison pastoral carer

Beyond the privation of liberty by which incarceration is defined, a custodial sentence entails the forfeitures of: autonomy, personal security, purposeful activity, material possessions, livelihood, life years, self-esteem, heterosexual contact, dignity and reputation, and even happiness. The grieving prisoner is in this sense doubly bereaved, first by imprisonment — 'a kind of bereavement for oneself'¹¹ — and then by the loss of a loved one. These losses intersect, with civic loss (the revocation of civil rights by a government, typically following a criminal conviction) consistently perceived as compounding the experience of bereavement.¹² Prisoners are deprived, in short, of what it is to be human:

These places can be corrosive of your humanity. — Participant 15, prison chaplain

In addition to the hardships specific to the carceral environment, which Gresham Sykes famously called 'the pains of imprisonment'¹³, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that, even before they enter a prison, offenders are likely to have experienced distressing life events that may be a factor in their criminal behaviour. Studies consistently show that offenders suffer bereavements at significantly higher rates than the general population and are more likely to have endured traumatic or multiple losses, often early in life.¹⁴ For instance, around 90 per cent of 16-20-year olds at the Young Offender Institution in Vaswani's research had suffered at least one bereavement.¹⁵

It's a rare day that I don't have some kind of dealing with bereavement, whether it's breaking bad news or taking someone to chapel to light a candle for someone they've lost, or just sitting and talking with them. — Participant 12, prison chaplain

Histories of addiction, child abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, forced prostitution, homelessness, unemployment and poverty are all far more common among people with convictions than others, and impact on offending.¹⁶ Many inmates carry with them the burden of multiple losses throughout their journey to prison and experience them even more acutely whilst inside.¹⁷ Thus, a bereavement experienced in prison must be recognised in the context of the cumulative effect of additional losses encountered over the life course.¹⁸

The Tasks of Mourning

The death of somebody we love is one of the most challenging periods of any individual's life, but it is much harder for prisoners, whose ability to cope is compromised by their incarceration. According to Worden, 'after one sustains a loss, there are certain 'tasks of mourning' that must be accomplished for the process of mourning to be completed'¹⁹: to accept the reality of the loss; to work through the pain of grief; to adjust to a world without the deceased; and to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. Each of these is made more difficult for those serving a custodial sentence.

The first task is to recognise the reality of the loss. The disadvantages that prisoners experience arise even before death occurs, as their incarceration prevents them from sharing in the professional and family support available at the end of a life. Anticipatory grief begins early; the distance that prison creates between offenders and their loved ones means that prisoners must contemplate losses before they have happened.²⁰ For various reasons, prisoners are often restricted from contacting their dying relatives in the community.²¹ Acceptance may be difficult, especially when there has been no opportunity to say goodbye. Without this, the shock is heightened, raising the possibility of a more complex grief process.²²

Clients who have been unable to visit their loved one prior to death or attend the funeral

11. Jewkes, Y. (2005) 'Loss, liminality and the life sentence: managing identity through a disrupted life course' in Liebling, A. & Maruna, S. (Eds.) *The Effects of Imprisonment*. Devon: Willan Publishing
12. Lillie, AK., Corcoran, M., Read, S., Santatzoglou, S., Wrigley, A. & Hunt, K. (2016) 'Supporting death, dying and bereavement in the English criminal justice system: An exploratory qualitative study', *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 52(6)
13. Sykes, G. (1958) *The Society of Captives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
14. See, for example, Hester, R. & Taylor, W. (2011) 'Responding to bereavement, grief and loss: Charting the troubled relationship between research and practice in youth offending services', *Mortality*, 16(3)
15. Vaswani, N. (2014) 'The ripples of death: Exploring the bereavement experiences and mental health of young men in custody,' *The Howard Journal*, 53(4)
16. Maschi, T. *et al*, *op cit.*,
17. Vaswani, N. (2015), *op cit.*
18. Wilson, M., Johnston, H. & Walker, L. (2020). "'It was like an animal in pain": Institutional thoughtlessness and bereavement in prison', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*
19. Worden, JW., *op cit*
20. Vaswani, N. (2014), *op cit.*
21. Lillie, AK. *et al* (2018), *op cit.*
22. Ferszt, G. (2002) 'Grief experiences of women in prison following the death of a loved one', *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 10(3)

feel disconnected, sometimes unable to accept that it has actually happened. — Participant 18, prison bereavement counsellor

Typically, a prison chaplain will deliver the news of a death in private, but at times, the information may be passed on by a staff member unknown to the offender or in an open environment.²³ This communication can affect the person adversely for years to come, with survivors often remembering exactly what was said.²⁴ The prisoner will normally want to establish more details of the death and be with their family, but the compromise must be telephone calls, during which they may receive only limited details.²⁵ The recently bereaved are likely to want a lot of communication with their friends and family, so policy changes allowing for more frequent and more private visits and phone calls may help prisoners to feel reassured about how others are coping, and get support for themselves.

Mourning usually begins with a sense of numbness and disbelief; while the numbness is short-lived, the denial can last many months.²⁶ The reality of the death may not 'sink in' until the individual has attended the chapel of rest or the funeral, important rituals for gaining a sense of closure.²⁷ Participation is not always possible for those whose liberty is limited by the criminal justice system, because 'their victim may be a member of the family, or the police don't want them in the area or all sorts of different reasons. In some of the busier prisons, they don't go because there are no staff to take them, and that's always a tragedy' (Participant 15, prison chaplain). Prisoners have commented on the humiliating experience of attending a funeral in handcuffs with a police escort, with many preferring not to attend at all than to arrive in chains.²⁸ It is also common for prisoners to be excluded from the service by their families, with the result that they may not know even know the location of the grave.²⁹

Going to the funeral or bedside of somebody that you truly love and are truly connected to

is hugely helpful. — Participant 15, prison chaplain

During a prison visit as part of fieldwork, staff explained that, although there are many stages to an application for day release, they are processed quickly, and approval can even be granted on the same day, so that it is rare that a prisoner will be unable to attend because of paperwork delays. Requests are more commonly rejected because the deceased was not a close relative; Prison Service Instruction 13/2015 on Release on Temporary Licence allows prisoners 'to visit close relatives who are terminally ill or to attend funerals of close relatives' and lists approved relationships.³⁰ One prisoner, overhearing this conversation, commented that being prevented from attending the funeral of someone who did not meet

the criteria is 'a double kick in the teeth', and staff acknowledged that this rejection often manifests in behaviour. Determining eligibility by familial relationship overlooks the fact that prisoners may have extended networks that have played significant roles in their upbringing, and close emotional ties to others.

Prisons now are saying, 'We can't afford for two officers to be out all day just to take somebody to a funeral', so that has virtually stopped now. I can't remember the last time we had a client who had attended a funeral whilst in prison. — Participant 17, prison bereavement counsellor

Being unable to attend the funeral or pay respects at the chapel of rest can be a major hurdle in coming to terms with the finality of the loss and denies bereaved prisoners a socially acceptable outlet for their grief.³¹ This brings us to Worden's second task; the loss needs to be repeatedly thought through, even 'pained through' for equilibrium to be re-established. Mourning is a healthy response to the death of a loved one, and survivors must have the opportunity to grieve, but several factors make this difficult in prison, including

Mourning usually begins with a sense of numbness and disbelief; while the numbness is short-lived, the denial can last many months.

-
23. Masterton, J. (2014) 'A confined encounter: the lived experience of bereavement in prison', *Bereavement Care*, 33(2)
24. Jervis, J. (2018) 'Mourning in custody: Dealing with sudden death' in Read, S., Santatzoglou, S. & Wrigley, A. (Eds.) *Loss, Dying and Bereavement in the Criminal Justice System*. London: Routledge
25. Potter, M. (1999) 'Inside' grief', *Bereavement Care*, 18(2).
26. Rees, D., *op cit*
27. Doka, KJ. (1989), *op cit*.
28. Schetky, DH. (1998) 'Mourning in prison: Mission impossible?' *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law*, 26
29. Lane, R. (2015) *Disenfranchised and Imprisoned Grief and Loss within the Prison Context*. (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Chester
30. Ministry of Justice (2015) *Release on Temporary Licence*. Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 13/2015. London: Ministry of Justice
31. Potter, M., *op cit*

lack of privacy, fear of reprisals, and the pressure of hegemonic masculinity.

For a lot of offenders, there's been no opportunity to talk about bereavement, either recent or past and, of course, once they're in an HMP situation, it's all about saving face, it's all about bravado, not showing any signs of weakness. — Participant 17, prison bereavement counsellor

It is difficult to complete the task of mourning when one rarely has a moment to oneself. The lack of privacy and the pervasive rules governing daily life limit inmates' ability to process their feelings.³² Some prisoners yearn for a private place where they can be alone with their thoughts, while others find the atmosphere too constricting to reflect on the loss at all.³³ Paradoxically related to the lack of privacy is loneliness; prisoners are never alone but very often lonely.³⁴ Although inmates have constant company, they are typically socially isolated, whereas it is generally accepted that people are more able to endure bereavement when traditional social networks are available.³⁵ Confinement stops the bereaved from spending time with their family and friends or employing distraction techniques, both of which are important coping strategies.³⁶ Separation from the usual sources of support complicates grief, as feelings of loss can intensify when the mourner feels alone with them.³⁷

I've had half of the jail in this chapel in floods of tears. I'm more worried about the guys who don't open up, and bottle it up, because when they bottle it up it just comes out in all sorts of awful ways. — Participant 12, prison chaplain

It is difficult to complete the task of mourning when one rarely has a moment to oneself. The lack of privacy and the pervasive rules governing daily life limit inmates' ability to process their feelings.

Tearfulness, panic attacks and angry outbursts are common responses to bereavement, particularly for disenfranchised grievers, but difficult to express in secure environments without negative consequences.³⁸ Emotional displays can be interpreted by prison officers either as a disciplinary problem or as a manifestation of mental illness, which can lead to the inmate being punished or put on suicide watch; Lane saw first-hand that those who reacted violently were much more likely to be segregated for 23 hours a day, reducing harm to others but exacerbating their own troubles.³⁹ Rationalised by staff on safeguarding grounds, these measures are felt by inmates to be punitive and controlling, an additional mortification at an already painful time.⁴⁰ With acts of misconduct potentially increasing the length of one's sentence, emotional reactions must be suppressed in favour of maintaining control and demonstrating stoicism. Prisoners may opt, where possible, to conceal the news of a death from staff to avoid attracting unwanted attention.⁴¹

Female prisoners are more likely to talk things through with other prisoners. But, in a male prison, where it's very much a dog-eat-dog environment, they're unlikely to be inclined to do that. — Participant 11, prison chaplain

Another disincentive to healthy grieving is peer pressure. The need to mask vulnerability is keenly felt by both sexes, but this is one way in which the experience of the grieving prisoner is gendered, as the expectation to appear tough is particularly intense for men and boys.⁴² Male prisoners are subject to a strict social code that includes 'not losing control; not crying openly; not being afraid, dependent, insecure, anxious or passive; not expressing loneliness or sadness; not touching other men and not showing weakness'.⁴³ As Toch puts

32. Vaswani, N. (2014), *op cit*

33. Harner, HM., Hentz, PM. & Evangelista, MC. (2011) 'Grief interrupted: the experience of loss among incarcerated women', *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(4)

34. Wilson, M. (2011) 'Exploring the efficacy of a bereavement support group for male category C prisoners', *Bereavement Care*, 30(3)

35. Duwe, G. & Johnson, BJ. (2016) 'The effects of prison visits from community volunteers on offender recidivism', *The Prison Journal*, 96(2)

36. Wilson, M. (2010), *op cit*

37. Ferszt, G., *op cit*

38. Doka, KJ. (2002). *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges and Strategies for Practice*. Research Press, Illinois

39. Lane, R., *op cit*

40. Masterton, J., *op cit*

41. Schetky, DH., *op cit*

42. Crewe, B. (2014). 'Not looking hard enough': masculinity, emotion and prison research *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(4)

43. Hendry, C. (2009) 'Incarceration and the tasks of grief: A narrative review', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65(2)

it, 'the coping strategy par excellence is to assume the status of the Manly Man'.⁴⁴ The 'macho' prison culture prevents the bereaved from working through their loss or confiding in others. Grief, if expressed at all, is likely to be conveyed through maladaptive behaviour. In a fraught, hypermasculine environment where 'vulnerability is exploited brutally and ruthlessly' (Participant 11, prison chaplain), one must conform to a narrow, toxic idea of how to be a man, or risk becoming a target. Bereaved male prisoners tend not to seek help even when they are in severe emotional distress or at crisis point.⁴⁵

To survive in prison, there's this perception that you need to be seen by all the other prisoners as quite tough and not somebody to mess with. [...] If men were encouraged by society to ask for that kind of help and have a cry now and again, the prison would probably be half-empty. — Participant 9, probation officer

For some, what Freud calls 'grief work'⁴⁶ is deemed too difficult to focus on while in prison, and offenders may deliberately avoid confronting their losses to protect themselves from further hurt. Stevenson and McCutchen describe how bereaved offenders often 'deny their emotions because by denying them they believe they can avoid painful emotional episodes', with the result that these feelings become internalised.⁴⁷ This coping strategy may be a useful means of self-preservation, but failure to grieve can be very damaging in the long term.⁴⁸

Worden's third task is for the individual to become accustomed to life without their loved one. In any bereavement, it takes time to realise what life is like without the deceased and adapt not just to the loss of the person but, often, to new responsibilities and a

changed sense of self. Naturally, a person who is removed from the life and family he has known will struggle to accept the new order of things. In many cases, it will not be until the individual reintegrates into his home life that he fully appreciates his loss. For prisoners, however, this world remains 'frozen in time' until release.⁴⁹

This idea of suspended grief is particularly relevant to the final task of mourning, in which the bereaved reinvests in other relationships while keeping the memory of the deceased alive. Prison inhibits an individual's ability first to commemorate and find an enduring connection to the dead, and then to move on. Although incarceration prevents inmates from visiting graves and reminiscing with family and friends — rites taken for granted on the outside — some are still able to mark anniversaries in their own way in prison. Vaswani found that those who took the approach of consciously remembering their loved one seemed more adjusted.⁵⁰

Those who experience bereavement in the criminal justice system may struggle to invest in relationships, as there is limited opportunity for contact with family or pursuing new friendships. Relational ties to those outside are very important but maintaining them in prison can be difficult. The formation of new relationships is another beneficial step that is often deferred until release.⁵¹ Research has found inmates to be wary of developing friendships in prison and to have difficulty offloading to one another.⁵² Some feel that to become emotionally attached will only cause more pain, as they fear that their vulnerability will be exploited, or that they will have to endure a second loss upon the transfer, release or death of the new friend.⁵³ The sex offenders I met during fieldwork found the prospect of release daunting because they would lose the valuable friendships that they had established with

Those who experience bereavement in the criminal justice system may struggle to invest in relationships, as there is limited opportunity for contact with family or pursuing new friendships.

44. Toch, H. (1975) *Men in Crisis: Human Breakdown in Prison*. Chicago: Aldine.
 45. Vaswani, N. (2014), *op cit*
 46. Freud, S. (1917) 'Mourning and melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. London: Hogarth
 47. Stevenson, RG. & McCutchen, R. (2006) 'When meaning has lost its way: life and loss "behind bars"', *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 14(2)
 48. Wilson, M. (2010), *op cit*
 49. Harner, HM. et al, *op cit*
 50. Vaswani, N. (2014), *op cit*
 51. Potter, M., *op cit*
 52. See, for example, Lane, *op cit*
 53. Ferszt, G., *op cit*

people who cared about them without judgement. Schetky explains that 'when there is no opportunity to invest in new relationships, inmates may cling to their lost ones'.⁵⁴

The Dual Process Model

Contemporary researchers have begun to challenge established grief theories, and new models are emerging. Healing from bereavement does not occur as a straight, linear path towards restored happiness. An alternative to the conventional phasal model was put forward by Dutch academics Stroebe and Schut⁵⁵ and is considered here both as a contrast to Worden's framework and to demonstrate a further impediment imposed by incarceration. According to the dual process model, the bereaved individual oscillates between traditional grief work, and practical tasks or distractions. The alteration can happen over minutes (as in the fluctuation between emotional and pragmatic responses in the immediate aftermath of a death), days, or months. Whereas Worden recommends allowing oneself to hurt and mourn, Stroebe and Schut 'argue the additional necessity to take time off from the pain of grief'. The central claim of the dual process model is dosage; 'the grieving individual at times confronts, at other times avoids, the different tasks of grieving'. There is a healthy 'to and fro' between loss-oriented activities like crying, thinking about the deceased and going over events on the one hand, and restoration-oriented activities like taking part in hobbies, work productivity and domestic responsibilities on the other. Oscillation is necessary for optimal adjustment, so when griever tend to distract themselves and keep busy, they should be encouraged instead to express their feelings, and vice versa. The important difference is that the tasks of mourning model pertains to the individual's emotional journey, whereas the dual process model relates to the behavioural manifestations of that pain and healing. This perhaps makes it a more suitable lens through which to view prisoners' grief, as their behaviour is more easily monitored and altered than their mental states.

A lot of them can't control their own emotions, they can't control anything, really,

in their lives. — Participant 14, Prison pastoral carer

How successfully can this model be followed in prison? Inmates are in a closely controlled environment, with few opportunities for restorative activities. This severely limits the freedom to balance one's time between reflection and distraction, and a prisoner may not have access to, or may refuse, suitable support. The phasal and oscillatory models are by no means incompatible. Perhaps a more holistic perspective, informed by both theories, presents the richest understanding; a broadly linear progression through different stages but, within each stage, frequent alternations between grieving and getting on. Failure to find a balanced response can complicate grief.

Unresolved or Disenfranchised Grief

When the normal grieving process is suppressed or delayed, atypical grief reactions arise. 'Unresolved grief' is a category of intense, protracted grief that occurs when a person does not complete mourning in a healthy way. It is possible to have incomplete healing from a bereavement just as one might have incomplete healing from a wound.⁵⁶ The individual often feels stuck in their grief, struggles

Healing from bereavement does not occur as a straight, linear path towards restored happiness.

to come to terms with or fully mourn their loss, and may never find closure. The risk of this is higher for those in the criminal justice system due to their predisposition to vulnerability, the barriers to grieving and the ongoing exposure to life stressors in a prison environment.⁵⁷ Subsequently, Schetky believes 'unresolved grief is almost the norm in prison populations but is likely to be masked by other behaviours, particularly disruptive ones'.⁵⁸

Similar to unresolved grief is the more specific idea of disenfranchised grief. Whereas unresolved grief could follow any loss, 'disenfranchised grief' is defined by Kenneth Doka as 'grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported'.⁵⁹ It is grief that falls outside of the grieving rules. Healthcare professionals have described how the incarcerated relatives of people who die in the general

54. Schetky, DH., *op cit*

55. Stroebe, M. & Schut, H., *op cit*

56. Worden, JW., *op cit*

57. Durcan, G. (2008) *From the Inside: Experiences of Prison Mental Health Care*. London: Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health.

58. Schetky, DH., *op cit*

59. Doka, KJ. (1989), *op cit*.

population are overlooked because they are not routinely included in the bereavement support mechanisms of hospitals and hospices.⁶⁰ As marginalised and vulnerable people who are often excluded from rituals, separated from social networks and unable to mourn openly, prisoners are disenfranchised grievers whose loss is typically invisible or ignored.

In prison, they're completely disenfranchised, they can't express that grief. Often, they're not allowed to go to funerals as well, so they can't get through that process. So, often they've got all these issues stacked up. — Participant 12, prison chaplain

This intensifies bereavement and adds to the challenges that confront a prisoner upon release. Normal grief symptoms become acute and persistent and begin to interfere with functioning. This can have serious health consequences that present all the characteristics of a disease, with symptoms including sleep disorders, raised blood pressure, heart problems, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation.⁶¹ These patterns can become so fixed that any chance of recovery is remote. The task, then, is to learn how to identify bereavement and facilitate healing during a custodial sentence to reduce the chance of disenfranchised grief.

Conclusion

Grief is a great leveller, and the pain of losing a loved one is likely to be familiar and relatable to prison staff as well as other inmates. Nevertheless, prisoners perceive some staff as feeling awkward or having limited skills to work empathically,⁶² and support remains fragmented, as the 'management' of

bereavement is treated as secondary to security concerns.⁶³ Prison protocol often takes precedence over any ritual behaviours considered vital at a time of significant loss⁶⁴. Bereavement is not a mental illness or a behavioural problem to be treated or managed. A profound emotional response to the loss of someone we care about is entirely natural. We might say that grief is the price we pay for love, and worth paying.

Every prisoner has a right to grieve, but the complexities of incarceration pose a challenge for criminal justice professionals as they strive to meet the needs of offenders without compromising order and security. We have seen how institutional barriers hamper the healthy processing of grief and often dramatically reduce a prisoner's chances of resolving his losses in a healthy way. These disruptions have significant implications for successful reintegration back into the community, and can manifest as offending behaviours.⁶⁵

To locate this problem within its wider policy context, the more that is understood about bereavement behind bars, the stronger the position for supporting prisoners through their grief, so that fewer people are released from prison with mental health and pastoral care needs. The diversity and the gravity of the challenges confronting bereaved prisoners is evident, but the solutions to these obstacles are less clear. Empirical research has exposed a disturbing lack of effective bereavement interventions, as well as a shortage of time, knowledge, and resources among staff to meet the demands of grieving offenders.⁶⁶ This affects the level of support a prisoner expects from the institution, which may result in him displaying the only degree of agency he can — maladaptive and avoidant coping. There is an urgent need to implement resources to support grieving prisoners, both for their own benefit and as a matter of public health and safety.

60. Lillie, AK. et al (2018), *op cit*.

61. Rees, D., *op cit*

62. Wilson, M. (2010), *op cit*

63. Lillie, AK. (2018) 'Loss at the end of life: Palliative care in prisons' in Read, S., Santatzoglou, S. & Wrigley, A. (Eds.) *Loss, Dying and Bereavement in the Criminal Justice System*. London: Routledge

64. Aday, R. & Wahidin, A. (2016) 'Older prisoners' experiences of death, dying and grief behind bars', *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 55(3)

65. Leach, RM., Burgess, T. & Holmwood, C. (2008) 'Could recidivism in prisoners be linked to traumatic grief?' A review of the evidence', *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 4

66. See, for example, Hester, R. & Taylor, W., *op cit*