Open Thanatology December 2022 Meeting

Presentation by Caroline Lloyd

Topic: Do Females Grieve Following Adolescent Perinatal Loss?

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And this is I finished my PhD earlier on this year and this is 1 strand of the findings from my PhD study. And so today I'm just gonna talk about the the results that I had from the perinatal grief intensity scale. And I'm gonna situate them within the wider study. But obviously, you've had to be selective with the time restraints. Otherwise I'd be going on all day and talking about the whole study.

And but I started looking at the statistics around adolescent pregnancy losses and because we see and there's an awful lot of.

Empirical data and non empirical data we see on social media. There's certainly over the last five years or so and we're seeing a lot of discussions around miscarriages, stillbirths and and we can see the politicization of abortions and abortion losses. And but I didn't notice anything around adolescence experiences. So when I looked at The Who, the World Health Organization.

All of the participants, the questionnaire participants, had experienced a miscarriage or an abortion during adolescence, and they were aged between 19 and 57, so there was a huge range of ages with the participants. But however it it was a small it was a small sample and the country's the women were in England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. the US, New Zealand.

And Scotland.

I think the first the first finding.

And that was surprising to to several people and we within my my research group was that there was no statistical difference between the schools of women who had experienced adolescent abortions or adolescent miscarriages.

And.

And I think I've run ANOVA queries for any of you that are wondering what I did, so I used the schools run ANOVA queries and there really was no statistical difference and the the.

The PGIS ask questions around three different themes.

And it could dominantly trying to assess what the meaning the reality of the pregnancy was to a woman or or a female. And I used the P GIS twice. So I asked the participants to retrospectively answer the questions as they remembered feeling at the time of the loss within the immediate time following the loss, and then again, how do they?

How did they feel about the pregnancy now as an adult woman?

And that covers the the personhood of the pregnancy. And there was no difference, which I thought was really, really interesting. And and my positionality is, I wanted to understand the impact of the loss on what was the impact of the loss, if any, across the lifespan not wasn't interested in the politics around abortion or miscarriage. So that was all stripped out.

I am the overall schools.

Uh for both groups with that, 37% had no change in schools over time, which which is not unusual for any for any and any grief response. So if we look at, for example, Lewis Tonkins model about how we how we grow our world around the lots having no change in the love in the grief is is not a sign that somebody is massively grieving and not getting over it.

And I just want to put that into context.

37% had decreased schools over time, so they tended to be the women that had high schools in the beginning or higher schools when the loss occurred. The high scores as determined retrospectively, but that they had to decreased over time. And what I found in the interview is when I was teasing out, you know, the depth of the reasons behind the scores. What I found is that women do reflect.

And reinterpret their responses to what happened when they were young in response to fear their reproductive events. So if they had a miscarriage, or if they had a live birth and they were active parents with life, children, and that the way that they viewed that the there was a significant difference between how they felt at the time and the impact of that loss to them at that time did change overtime when they had children.

On 26% had increased scores over time and and most notably. And again this is a small sample.

I'm is that they were participants based in the US and they were based in Ireland and they were predominantly abortion schools. So I do think there would be I'd love to do more research to find out how the politicization of abortions in both countries because abortion was illegal in Ireland until 2018 in the Republic until 2018 and how that the views of abortion.

And has impacted on the grief scores of these women. I think this there's a real opportunity to do more research there that I'd love to do and but I would like to say some people.

We'll look at this and see an increased grief score and want to ascribe some kind of prolonged grief disorder label, and I would be very cautious about that. And I'm because there's a lot more nuance.

And from the study that kind of explains these increased scores rather than them just being, you know, prolonged grief disorder and and and and a pathological response.

So all of these girls said that they wanted advice and bereavement support at the time, but they didn't get it. And before I started my research, I did look online as a layperson and Googled as most people do, to see if I could find any kind of resources or support or information on abortion, miscarriage, grief.

Research she she talks about not presenting to medical services. She's a nurse social.

And I think that there may be an argument that the stigma and the labeling and the social negativity around these events might prevent girls from actually speaking out and going and asking for help or advice or support when they need it, because another predominant thing was around silence and how they didn't tell anybody and they didn't tell their friends. And and there were one questionnaire participant who got pregnant at 14.

Who said through right?

Who said that she still hasn't ever told anybody about about that that occurrence.

And, but also I'd like to highlight that in the question is over 1/3 of my participants had experienced a significant bereavement prior to this event.

So we don't know or I don't know if those events have any significant bereavement, particularly if it's a parental death.

And has a cumulative effect on the PGIS responses. So if you're already grieving and you have a significant.

And bereavement that that you're enduring at the time. And then this happens on top of it. I don't know if that's going to impact on these scores. So that needs to be taken into consideration.

Also.

With regards to cumulative impacts, you know we don't just suddenly experience something and impact that and and and and have an impact of that. And in isolation of anything else that's going on in our lives and a lot of my participants in well, five of the six participants in phase two had experienced adverse childhood experiences and and we know that they can have traumatic impact on children which again.

My impact on the perinatal grief intensity scale.

And so I just want to be very cautious. You know, we see things like this on social media without any context. It's very easy to say ohh, you know, 1/4 of girls who have miscarriages or abortions have prolonged grief disorder. Well, it it isn't done. Black and white. It is much, much, much more nuanced than that.

They across the lifespan.

All of the participants in the interview phase said there was a fondness and attachment to the pregnancy, which I thought was really, really interesting.

But despite the empirical data calling these young women bereaved parents, bereaved mothers, the loss of a baby in my study, only 36% of the questionnaire respondents labeled themselves that way, so they did not self identify as a brief parent at all and only 33% of the interview participant ID Self identified as a brief parent. So I think there's an argument that we really need to stop.

Imposing an identity on somebody and actually ask them how. How do you want? How do you feel? Do you feel like you're a bereaved parents? And again, I didn't ask them what? How they defined parenting. So I just said in the questionnaire, do you self identify as a bereaved parent or a bereaved mother? And as I say, 36% said yes.

And also an into another interesting finding which I wasn't expecting.

Was I I I think my assumption and the assumption of my PhD supervisor is with the politicisation of abortion.

I, due to religious influences, particularly in the US and in Ireland, would the ascription of personhood at the time of conception by religious organisations particularly need Catholicism in islands?

I had. I had wondered if women who identified as Catholic would.

Assign personhood at the time of conception and then considered themselves to be a bereaved parent. But actually the responses from my question is, would the opposite. So all of the women who identified as religious and were actively engaged in religiosity did not consider did not self identify as a bereaved mother, but women who were not religious did not identify with any kind of religious organization.

One more likely to consider themselves a bereaved mother, and I thought that was fascinating, and I'd love to find out why and and. And I I think that's a limitation of my studies. I didn't. I didn't. I didn't know that was gonna happen. So I didn't didn't build in a further question to find out why that was. But I thought that was really, really interesting.

And and to summarize, these events can be as impactful as adult experiences and and and they can be across the lifespan, particularly in response to either reproductive losses. And I had one interview participant who had an abortion at 18 because she was going to university and she said it was the right thing to do at the time. But across her lifespan, when she was ready to become a mother, it just didn't happen.

And the way that she viewed those events, that event now and has completely changed.

And so I think we need to recognise that there are.

I didn't hold numbers of girls who are experiencing these events and not talking to anybody, not telling anybody, and I'm not suggesting they need to talk to anybody and I'm not suggesting that all girls that experience this are impacted. They're not. But for the ones that are.

And what I found is that the women that were most affected across the lifespan had a had experienced fear that adverse reproductive events. So I think for those women, and we should be mindful that there may be underlying factors that are affecting their response to that.

Incident as an adult that we don't know anything about, that they may not be telling us about.

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And and that that's that's me for now. Thank you very much.