

INTRODUCTION

- Bereavement, especially due to trauma, is associated with negative mental health outcomes
- Understanding how coping strategies affect long-term changes in mental health outcomes among traumatically-bereaved individuals has been limited by cross-sectional research designs.
- This study adds to our understanding of long-term effects of coping by describing how coping strategies predict changes in mental health outcomes.

METHOD

Sample

- Adult participants ($n = 140$) bereaved by combat, accident, or suicide.

Procedure

- Initial online survey between 2012-2015 (T1)
- Second survey in 2020 (T2)

Measures

Coping: BriefCOPE (1) *Active Coping*, (2) *Planning*, (3), *Positive Reframing*, (4), *Acceptance*, (5) *Humor*, (6) *Religion*, (7) *Using Emotional Support*, (8) *Using Instrumental Support*, (9) *Self-Distraction*, (10) *Denial*, (11) *Venting*, (12) *Substance Use*, (13) *Behavioral Disengagement*, and (14) *Self-Blame*

Depression: Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-8)

Grief: Inventory of Complicated Grief

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG): Post-traumatic Growth Inventory

Statistical Analysis

- Paired t-tests compared T1 and T2 grief, post-traumatic growth (PTG) and depression
- Each of the 14 coping strategies at T1 was examined as a predictor of *change* (T1-T2) in each outcome (grief, PTG, depression) in multivariate linear regression models
- Models adjusted for age, sex, time since loss, and T1 grief, PTG, or depression

RESULTS

Improvement in mental health outcomes five to eight years after first assessment.

Behavioral Disengagement associated with more severe grief symptoms

Active Coping and *Emotional Support* associated with increased posttraumatic growth



Changes in mental health outcomes

- No overall difference in mean grief scores between T1 and T2 ($p = 0.61$), but there were both increases and decreases among individuals
- PTG change scores increased ($p < 0.001$)
- Depression scores decreased from T1 to T2 ($p < 0.001$)

Coping predicting mental health outcomes

- Greater use of *Behavioral Disengagement* at T1 predicted higher severity of grief (i.e., higher increases or lesser decreases from T1) at T2 ($p < .05$)
- Greater use of *Active Coping* ($p < .001$) and *Emotional Support* ($p < .05$) at T1 predicted a greater increase in PTG from T1 to T2.
- Coping strategies were not significantly associated with changes in depression.

DISCUSSION

- First study to have examined these relationships at different time points in a bereaved sample
- Findings are consistent with cross-sectional studies describing associations between avoidance coping strategies and poorer outcomes, and supportive and active engagement coping strategies with more positive outcomes.
- Highlights coping strategies that can be targeted by interventions to facilitate adaptive grief outcomes among traumatically-bereaved individuals.

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