

Evaluating a bereavement support group.

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Palliative and Supportive care (2008), **6**, 43 – 49.

This study reports the outcome of an eight week structured bereavement support group run by experienced mental health professionals and held in a general hospital in New York. Group members were recruited by newspaper and television adverts. The majority were women, and they had experienced a range of different bereavements. Approximately one quarter dropped out after the first session. Each participant filled out assessment forms before starting and after the group finished. These measured mood scores and grief scores.

Results showed a modest reduction in grief scores from the beginning to the end of the group, but little or no effect on anxiety and depression. This was broadly similar to previous studies on the effectiveness of bereavement support groups. There was no obvious way of predicting those who would subsequently drop out.

The paper is clearly and simply written, and includes a useful review of previous literature and reference list. The authors acknowledge that this is an evaluation and not a research study as there was no control group, so observed changes in grief scores may have simply happened through chance or because of the natural process of grieving over time. The findings suggest that support groups will be popular with some people (although the drop out rate was relatively high given that those attending had selected themselves and knew beforehand what help was being offered), and may be helpful.