Prevalence of childhood bereavement in the face of the opioid epidemic

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A Critical Public Health Issue

Long overlooked, childhood bereavement is a critical public health issue nationwide. The death of a parent or other important person in a child’s life has been noted to be one of the most frequently reported disruptive childhood experiences.1,2 Experiencing a significant death loss during childhood often results in profound stress and adversity, and, without appropriate support, can derail a child’s development.3,4,5 Quantifying the magnitude of the issue of childhood bereavement can help aid in needs assessment, gap analysis, and the planning and provision of grief services in communities across the U.S.

The CBEM estimates that more than 4.9 million children across the country will be bereaved by age 18. That number more than doubles to over 12.8 million by age 25. Using 2013 to 2017 data, CBEM results model national and regional. Specifically, the CBEM applies binomial distribution and life table methods to CDC mortality and US Census population data to predict the number of children who will experience the death of a parent or sibling by the time they reach age 18 and 25. The CBEM is an accessible tool that helps

THE COST OF INACTION

Children and families bereaved due to an opioid overdose death often experience a range of hardships that may include frequent moves, out of home placements, decreased financial stability, and daily disappointments. These adverse experiences compound the invisible costs of addiction.

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References

6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC WONDER Online Database.

Childhood Bereavement and the Opioid Crisis

In many states, elevated rates of opioid-related adult deaths (age 25-54) map onto higher rates of childhood bereavement for youth under 18 bereaved due to parent death. Children bereaved due to a substance-related death are often forgotten victims. Few resources are allocated to upstream prevention programs aimed at assisting these vulnerable youth in coping with grief reactions and getting back to a healthy developmental trajectory. Now is the time for researchers, practitioners, educators, policy makers, and advocates to unite in support of these children and their families.3,4,5 By investing in awareness and prevention, we can create social change that ensures a compassionate response for all grieving children that promotes healthy growth.

Addiction in the US

Substance use disorder is a chronic health condition that requires continuous treatment.

Children bereavement rates vary between the states. California has the lowest rate with an estimated 5.1% of children becoming bereaved, while a stunning 11.9% of children in West Virginia are estimated to experience the death of a parent or sibling. National and State CBEM reports are available at www.judishouse.org/cbem.