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Prolonged grief and posttraumatic stress in bereaved children: a latent class analysis

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Abstract

Few studies have yet examined subgroups among children (aged 8-18) confronted with the death of a close loved one, characterized by different profiles of symptoms of prolonged grief disorder (PGD) and symptoms of bereavement-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study sought to identify such subgroups and socio-demographic and loss-related variables associated with subgroup membership. We used data from 332 children, most of whom (>80%) were confronted with the deaths of a parent, mostly (>50%) due to illness. Latent class analysis revealed three classes of participants: a resilient class (38.6%), a predominantly PGD class (35.2%), and a combined PGD/PTSD class (26.2%). Class membership was associated with self-rated levels of depression and functional impairment, and parent-rated behavioural problems. No significant between-class differences on demographics or loss-related variables were found. The current findings of distinct classes of PGD, and PGD plus PTSD attest to the construct validity of PGD as a distinct disorder, and can inform theory building and the development of diagnostic instruments relevant to children with pervasive distress following loss.

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