Reviewer's report

Title: When a parent dies - a systematic review of the effects of support programs for parentally bereaved children and their caregivers

Version: 0 Date: 17 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Alison Penny

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for this important article, which adds to our understanding of the effectiveness of supportive interventions for parentally bereaved children, and makes useful suggestions for further research in this area.

ABSTRACT

P3 Line 9-10 While anxiety and depression are mental health problems, I would not describe perception of lack of control as strongly as this. Perhaps 'risks of mental health problems and threats to emotional well-being...' or something similar.

p3 line 18 Brent et al's sample was limited to those bereaved suddenly - this should be specified

p3 Line 35 replace 'lives' with 'live'

p3 42-43 Unhelpful to conflate traumatic and complicated grief here - two different concepts. This paragraph is about child traumatic grief - another may be needed on complicated/prolonged grief in young people (eg Spuij et al 2012)

p3 line59 If the policy impetus for this paper was specifically about sudden death, does it matter that the studies include those for children bereaved through expected death?

p5 line 3-4 Perhaps alter 'whether the intervention had been effective for the children' to 'the effectiveness of the intervention for the children' as this is a matter of degree rather than yes/no

p5 line 21 Would be helpful to know if this was based on a particular cut-off/ power calculation, particularly given that this point is used in the discussion
In the phrase 'there was strong evidence for 13 studies, fairly strong evidence for 3 studies and weaker evidence for 1 study' suggest replacing with '13 studies provided strong evidence, 3 studies...' etc

Suggest replacing 'Which support interventions are evaluated that focus on effects for the children?' with 'What types of interventions that focus on effects for the children were evaluated in the studies?'

Throughout this section and the 'key results' section, check tenses for consistency.

'expected respectively' check grammar

'Support for the parents' - should this be 'feelings of being supported'?

Please provide reference for this systematic review (presumably Rosner et al)

- define primary and secondary preventative for audiences not familiar with this typology

Conclusion that interventions need to be directed at both needs a little more support, eg is the effect size for children's outcomes greatest in the interventions that target both parents and children, or is this conclusion being drawn because large effect sizes were found for both groups

The paragraph starting 'the article reviews studies' effects' contains a number of points, which could usefully be separated and possibly expanded e.g. support for both/support directed at children/value of group support/value of family support/insufficiency of programmes for some children/

The paragraph starting 'This systematic review' is v important and well written

Maybe need to add something about whether these groups might be under-represented in evaluation studies
Are the methods appropriate and well described?  
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?  
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?  
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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I am currently in receipt of an ESRC doctoral studentship (via the Bloomsbury DTC) for a study exploring the effectiveness of UK childhood bereavement services.

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