Author’s response to reviews

Title: Following the MH17 plane crash in the Ukraine: A qualitative interview study on the experience of sudden loss of a colleague or neighbour

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Author’s response to reviews:

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Dear Editor,

We would like to thank you for your constructive feedback and remarks that helped us improve our manuscript. On behalf of my co-authors, I would like to submit the revised version of our manuscript with the title “Following the MH17 plane crash in the Ukraine: A qualitative interview study of grief after the sudden loss of a colleague or neighbor” All your suggestions and remarks have been carefully addressed (please see below). The suggested revisions have also been incorporated in the revised version of the manuscript.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of my co-authors,

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Response to Editor’s remarks:

1. Very little information is available regarding the development of the checklist used to explore the grief-related themes. It is not clear how the questions were identified and selected, who developed them and the general process leading to the final version of the instrument. You should provide details about the construction process of the interview and also a literature background which the questions are based on. What is the checklist intended to assess and how is this related to grief? You should also provide more detailed information about how it was administered. More details about the procedure used to extract the themes should be provided, as this section appears poorly described/reported.

As requested, the Methods section is enhanced with additional information regarding the included
questions (page 6, first paragraph). More specifically:

“The current version of the structured interview was used for the first time in the present study, since there was no available/previously published checklist in this field that would be directly applicable to this context. The included items do not form an instrument since the purpose of the present study was not a quantitative assessment or diagnostically-oriented evaluation. Themes were derived from the existing literature synthesized by collaborating Institutes (Lenferink et al., 2019) and partly based on questions that were asked in the context of concurrent research among relatives (with blood ties) of the victims of the MH17-disaster in other stages/waves of the project (Lenferink et al., 2017; van der Velden et al., 2018), such as the ones included in the Traumatic Grief Inventory (Boelen et al., 2019). Items were adapted to the setting of relevance, taking into account the nature of the relationship between victims and responders and the background and context of the disaster incident.”

2. Why was one of the interviews conducted for two colleagues? I think this can introduce a bias in the findings: please, discuss carefully this point in the paper.

This was an exception, because the victims in this case were a married couple working in the same environment. This is specified in the “Procedures” section (“In this case the MH17 casualties were two married colleagues employed at the same company”). As requested, we have also mentioned this aspect as a potential limitation in the Discussion section (Practical implications, page 20).

3. More descriptive information should be provided about the participants (e.g. age)

Before conducting the interviews, participants were informed that the interview data would only be reported at an aggregated group level and would not be traceable to individual persons. As a result, descriptive information regarding gender is reported in the paper, but further details on biographical data/personal information are limited in the present study. What is also known though, is that except for one respondent who was 18 years old, all participants were adults older than 30 years old. We have included this information in the text as well.

4. It seems that the data were collected only on those participants who were mentioned in newspaper reports and interviews. This may create a selection bias in the group. You should discuss this point as a limitation in the Discussion section more carefully.

As requested, we have included the following text among the limitations in the Discussion section (Practical implications, page 20): “Considering that a complete list of colleagues and neighbors of the victims of the MH17 disaster was not registered / available, we approached people who were mentioned in media reports and interviews, in collaboration with the Victim Support Fund. This introduces the risk that the views of several potentially relevant participants were not covered. However, considering the nature of the incident and related research context, a high response is often not feasible.”

5. Overall, I suggest you to revise your paper and provide the additional information by following some of the available guidelines for qualitative research. You may follow for example the COREQ.
Following your suggestion, the paper is now in line with the COREQ guidelines (Tong et al., 2007), when applicable. We have also added the corresponding text in the Methods section, at page 6 (and also the relevant reference in the Reference list of the manuscript).

Minor issues

1. Page 5, row 1. Please, remove "more"

We made the requested correction.

2. When you cite a reference in the text, you should not cite the publication date. E.g. "Hazelton (2001) added a broader dimension to the problem [20]" should be replaced with "Hazelton [20] added a broader dimension to the problem". Please, amend this throughout the paper.

We made the requested corrections.