**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

**Authors:**

Joris Yzermans (j.yzermans@nivel.nl)

Christos Baliatsas (c.baliatsas@nivel.nl)

Peter Van der Velden (pg.vandervelden@tilburguniversity.edu)

Michel Dückers (m.duckers@nivel.nl)

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**Author’s response to reviews:**

November 7th, 2019

Dear Dr Pozza,

We would like to thank you and the reviewers, Dr Sveen and Dr Fernandez-Alcantara, 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 article with the (updated) title “Following the MH17 plane crash in the Ukraine: A qualitative interview study on the experience of sudden loss of a colleague or neighbour.

All suggestions and remarks have been carefully addressed. The suggested revisions are listed and also outlined in the revised manuscript. In addition, we proofread the manuscript, correcting several typo’s.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of my co-authors,

Christos Baliatsas, PhD
Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research (NIVEL)
E-mail: c.baliatsas@nivel.nl

Reviewer reports:

Josefin Sveen, Ph.D. (Reviewer 1):

In the manuscript the authors aimed to gain insight into how colleagues at work and neighbors experience sudden death after a disaster. I have several questions and suggestions.

1) I would encourage the authors to consider revision to the title to enhance clarity, "a study of grief", 
as stated in the aim of the study it is exploring the experience of loss and not specifically grief.

Response: We revised the title accordingly, based on reviewer’s suggestion. The title now emphasizes more on the experience of sudden loss.

2) The background description of the events following the MH17 crash is it necessary for the manuscript or can be shortened in the background?

Response: We believe that the relatively detailed background is important in order to facilitate the reader get a picture of the prior events and understand the context that motivated the present study.

3) Heading on page 4, line 44 only include workplace, should neighbors be included as well?

Response: The reason we only referred to ‘workplace’ is because we did not find any previous literature on health effects on neighbors within this context (it is mentioned in the text as well).

4) Page 4, line 46, refers to 9 different studies/reviews about health effects, which is very vague about the actual findings, a suggestion is to include more specific details. Also, the studies include different types of disaster, for example natural and man-made disasters. Are the health effects the same after different types of disasters?

Response: We included a number of key references to highlight that much is known about possible health effects of disasters among those directly affected (victims and families). As requested, we included more specific details regarding the overall findings of those studies. Health effects between natural and man-made disasters can vary and differ but this also depends on other factors (e.g. level of preparedness and infrastructure/resources, climate/weather conditions in the case of natural disasters etc). However, the pattern regarding health symptoms and psychological problems is often similar for man-made disasters (sleep problems, PTSD, anxiety, depression, medically unexplained symptoms) but even for different types of disasters (e.g. see Reifels et al., 2017).

5) The background address loss after disaster, but according to the aim the focus appear to be loss after sudden death. The individual in this disaster died suddenly, but a suggestion is to revise the aim to focus on loss after disaster.

Response: We adjusted the corresponding text, following reviewer’s suggestion.

6) The method section needs revision. First sentence in method, repeats the aim to some degree, but also differ: "how they grieve and cope", is it the same as "mourn"?

Response: We made some text adjustments in the aims and removed the overlapping sentence in the Methods section in order to avoid repetition.

7) Employed qualitative methods - can the authors be more specific what method was used?

Response: We have now added multiple specifications regarding the qualitative methods used in the study (see also response to Reviewer 2 regarding the COREQ recommendations).

8) Apart from the first sentence, the section describes how the checklist (or interview guide) was
developed. A suggestion is to add a subheading "Checklist development".

Response: We added the subheading as suggested.

9) Could examples be given on how themes were derived? What do the author mean by collaborating institutes and citing a systematic review?

Response: As requested, we have now included detailed specifications in the Procedure section, regarding the methodology based on which the themes were derived.
As described in the Methods section, we also looked at the broader literature on the impact of sudden loss; the cited review was performed by research institutes that participated in the project the current study was part of. We deleted the terms “collaborating institutes” to avoid misunderstandings.

10) The second paragraph in the methods, a suggestion is to include the text under "participants". Please state, if the consent was collected verbally and if they received written information about the study?

Response: As suggested, included the second paragraph of the methods under “Participants”. We provided the necessary clarifications regarding the consent.

11) Under the procedure section, second paragraph, "a protocol", what type of protocol is the authors refereeing to?

Response: We reworded the text (“extraction form” instead of “protocol”) to enhance clarity.

12) Should theren't be a section about the data analysis. How the data was analyzed and what method was used, needs to be described in more detailed.

Response: As requested, a separate Analysis section has been created, where further details on the method is described.

13) It is difficult to understand how the authors came to the themes in the results? Also can the author explain why some themes are "time frames" from the disaster and some are not? The results appear to be a description of the interviews organized according to content, and not so much a qualitative analysis of the interview to answer the research questions. How do the themes and its content relates to the aims of the study is not clear. For example, how does the first theme "Relationship to victim" relate to the study aim?

Response: We have now added detailed specifications on the analysis approach in the Methods section (and we have also added a separate “Analysis” sub-section). In short, we performed a “qualitative description”; The aim of such approach is to provide a straight-forward description of phenomena in everyday language. The information was extracted following the questions of the structured interview but the clustering of the items into themes is based on the analysis of the extracted data. Transcripts were analyzed on the basis of the analytic strategy of qualitative description studies (Sandelowski, 2000; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski et al., 2010).
All the items/questions included in the interview aimed to answer the research questions and at the same time elucidate as many (potentially) relevant aspects as possible. Some of the themes refer to or include time frames because of the importance of time in the experience of loss and also the fact that time goes hand in hand with the different events following the disaster (e.g. (theme “Commemoration:
18 months after the incident”). Aspects such as the nature/intensity of the relationship (how close the interviewees were to the victim) are strongly related to the study aims because they can have an important impact on the intensity and process of grief. For instance, the impact of sudden loss might be different on a neighbor who had been living next to the victim’s house for many years and knew the victim well, compared to a more distant neighbor.

14) First paragraph of Identification, is not results but a description of the event it sounds like. In the theme After one and a half years, it is not clear how the text is showing that ”most effects on health and well-being have vanished.” And it also raise the question, how was it before this time period, which is not described.

Response: We refer to those participants who stated that the disaster incident/loss of their colleague or neighbor/associated tension at home or at the workplace had an impact on their health/well-being during the first weeks after the disaster (in the theme “the first weeks” we do describe that some of the participants experienced health complaints or problems and/or sought medical help).
Considering that we follow a qualitative description approach, it is important to present some information regarding the event in order to enrich the context that accompanies the results.

15) Last sentence in the Unlike a car accident? ”To what extent this has an influence on mourning and how it might have affected health and well-being cannot be determined with certainty based on the interviews.” A suggestion is to move this to the Discussion.

Response: We agree that this seems to supplement the other themes and in the revised version we now categorize it as such. The “unlike an accident” theme provides more insight on what caused the loss and how colleagues and neighbors processed that. This is of importance, considering that the present study focuses on loss in the context of a very specific event such as a disaster.

16) First sentence in discussion, that the participants do not qualify themselves as bereaved person, is this information retrieved from the results?

Response: To avoid any possible misunderstanding we excluded that sentence from the text. It was indeed retrieved from the results but it solely referred to the commemoration event: Some participants did not feel that they had be invited, since they did not typically belong to the very inner circle (e.g. compared to close relatives/family).

17) I would encourage the authors to discuss the results, in accordance with the study aims, in the discussion and conclusion.

Response: We believe that content-wise we do follow the main research question, especially in the first paragraphs of the discussion. However we agree that the structure can be improved and be more in line with the study aims. We made some modifications, including relevant headings.

18) I would encourage the authors to significantly broaden the limitations of the study in the discussion.

Response: We added a separate “strengths and limitations” section in which the limitations of the study are clearly stated.
Fernandez-Alcantara Manuel (Reviewer 2):

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to review the article "Following the MH17 plane crash in the Ukraine: A qualitative interview study of grief after the sudden loss of a colleague or neighbour". The manuscript explore a really interesting topic in the field of grief that have not received enough attention in previous studies. Through a qualitative analysis authors identify the importance of grief reactions in colleagues and neighbours of people who died in the MH17 accident. The introduction is clearly written and the objective of the research is justified. However, there are some major issues in the Methods and Results sections that should be addressed:

Method:

1) Authors indicate that they have followed the COREQ recommendations in the method section. Nevertheless, most of the basic information to assure the rigor of qualitative research is absent in the manuscript. I strongly recommend that authors read carefully the COREQ paper and modify the whole method section. It is not included what type of qualitative analysis have they performed (i.e. phenomenology, content analysis, thematic analysis, etc.). Was the generation of codes inductive or deductive? How did authors create and modified the codes and the themes? What was the mean time of the interview? How were participants contacted? Did you use any kind of triangulation? Did you ended the interviews when saturation was reached? Were the interviews performed by the same researcher?

Response: As requested, we have modified the whole Method section accordingly, adding detailed specification on all the relevant aspects. The information provided in the Methods and Procedure section of the paper is now completely in line with the 32 items of the COREQ checklist. In line with this, we also added a "coding tree" table (Appendix), presenting key terms per theme.

2) In addition, more information is needed about the participants: Why three declined to take part in the study? What are the sociodemographic data of participants? Why only 6 neighbours participate in the study?

Response: In the Methods section we state regarding socio-demographic data: “Participants were informed that the interview data would only be reported at an aggregated group level and would not be traceable to individual persons. Biographical data/personal information is therefore not reported in this article, apart from gender.” In addition to gender, we provide some information about the age range as well. More specifically, we report in the Methods: “except for one responder who was 18 years old, all participants were adults older than 30 years old”.

Usually it is the direct neighbors (those living very close/next door) who know each other a bit better and are in the position to say something about (their relationship) with the victims and their feelings. Therefore, the number of participating neighbors would by definition be small (see also Limitations paragraph).

Some people declined to participate for personal reasons; we assume they did not wish to receive any attention, also considering the nature of the incident.

Results:

3) Authors identified a total of 11 themes. I think that the analysis is merely descriptive and that authors needs to integrate and to merge some of the themes. It seems that a theme was composed by two or three of the questions in the structured interview and it is complicate to follow. Also the quotations needs to be more informative of the subjective experience of the participants. Please include the full
quotations of participants in all themes and specify if participant were male or female and if it was colleague or neighbour.

Response: Following reviewer’s suggestion, we created a detailed table with quotations for each participant that specifically focus on the subjective experience of loss and emotions the first days/weeks after the disaster. This table also includes additional information such as gender and role (neighbor/colleague) per participant. We believe that in this way we, while we maintain the structure of the manuscript body, without making it extremely long and influencing its readability with the inclusion of numerous repetitive quotations. The analysis is descriptive in nature because the study follows the qualitative description approach, the purpose of which is to provide a straight-forward description of respondent’s perspective in simple language. (we added details in the Methods section). We do agree that a few themes seem to be a minor-supplementary and in the revised version we now categorize them as such (also following the recommendation of Reviewer 1).