

Forgotten families following workplace death

April 28 2014, by Jessica Hill

University of Sydney academics are advocating for a greater focus on the emotional, physical and financial toll of sudden workplace death on surviving families.

"The impact of a sudden, traumatic workplace death for the families of the workers killed is rarely considered beyond the days immediately following the death," says Associate Professor Lynda Matthews from the Faculty of Health Sciences.

"This is mainly because the formal procedures and investigations are focused on making judgments about possible breaches of law. They do not recognise families' need for timely information, support and justice.

"Despite some efforts to support them, families often experience extreme isolation."

Associate Professor Matthews and colleagues are conducting a world-first study to identify improvements that will help to better manage the consequences for families.

This follows a 2011 pilot study which showed profound long-term suffering for families.

"Our interviews revealed psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, and long-term physical health consequences like obesity, and all of this on top of financial stress," commented Professor Matthews.

"The impact on the children involved was particularly disturbing, with [family](#) tensions widespread and drug and alcohol use and violence common among adolescent children of deceased workers."

This has prompted a call for an increased focus on how formal protocols respond to families following traumatic work-related death.

Participants in the previous study discussed varying interactions with authorities following the death, with some acknowledging the death in meaningful ways and others responding in ways that families perceived as hurtful.

"One thing that became very clear was that protocols for keeping families informed of developments regarding inquests, investigations and court cases were not effective and require urgent attention.

"Despite recent attempts at reform, there is little evidence of regulatory processes meeting families' needs for information or support at any stage of the post-[death](#) process."

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Forgotten families following workplace death (2014, April 28) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-04-forgotten-families-workplace-death.html>

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