

The death of a close friend hits unexpectedly hard

May 13 2019



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The trauma caused by the death of a close friend endures four times longer than previously believed, according to new research from The Australian National University (ANU).

The researchers warn a lack of recognition about the time it takes people to mourn a close friend is leading to inadequate support being made available during the grieving process.

The study shows the [death](#) of a close friend will significantly affect a person's physical, psychological and social well-being up to at least four years.

Previous studies suggested the grieving period lasted for around 12 months.

The study analysed longitudinal data and indicators of [health](#) from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey of 26,515 Australians, of whom 9,586 had experienced the death of at least one close friend.

Lead author Dr. Wai-Man (Raymond) Liu said the study found people grieving a close friend suffered a significant decline in [physical health](#), [mental health](#), emotional stability and social life.

"These findings raise serious concerns with the way we manage the recovery for people dealing with the loss of a close friend," said Dr. Lui.

"We found there are serious declines in the health and wellbeing of people who had experienced the death of a close friend any time in the last four years.

"We all know that when someone loses a partner, parent or child, that person is likely to suffer through a significant grieving period.

"Yet death of a close friend, which most of us will experience, is not afforded the same level of seriousness by employers, doctors, and the community.

"The death of a friend is a form of disenfranchised grief—one not taken so seriously or afforded such significance"

"This is leaving people without the support and services they need during a very traumatic period of their lives."

Dr. Liu has called on [medical practitioners](#) and [policy makers](#) to rethink the way they approach dealing with people's grief after the loss of a friend.

"We need to recognise the death of a close [friend](#) takes a serious toll, and to offer health and psychological services to assist these people over an adequate period of time."

More information: Wai-Man Liu et al. Death of a close friend: Short and long-term impacts on physical, psychological and social well-being, *PLOS ONE* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0214838](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214838)

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: The death of a close friend hits unexpectedly hard (2019, May 13) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-death-friend-unexpectedly-hard.html>

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