

Childhood Bereavement Network response to the Department of Health's *Consultation on Improving the Process of Death Certification*

The **Childhood Bereavement Network** (CBN) is the national, multi-professional network of organisations and individuals working in the field of childhood bereavement. CBN promotes the interests of bereaved children, young people and their families and encourages the development of quality support for them. We have over 300 subscribers across the UK including all the major bereavement care providers.

This response relates to the registration rather than the certification of a death. We suggest that death registration could be an opportunity to gather important data on the annual number of children who are bereaved.

The need for data on bereavement in childhood

At present, no data is systematically collected on the number of children and young people bereaved each year. Data is collected each year on the number of children and young people affected each year by parental divorce, but not the number affected by parental death.

This data is vital to understand the scale of childhood bereavement and to be able to plan policy and practice development. It would help local authorities to assess the needs of bereaved children locally, and childhood bereavement services to estimate the level of demand for their services. 90% respondents to a recent survey conducted by the Childhood Bereavement Network felt that the government ought to know how many children are affected each year by the death of a parent or carer.

Limitations of current data collection

Attempts have been made to estimate the population of bereaved children from community studies. (Green et al., 2005) found that 4% of their sample of almost 8000 5-16 year olds had experienced the death of a parent or sibling. However, this percentage does not account for the different mortality rates (and therefore rates of bereavement) in different areas.

Census data gives the number of children living with a widowed parent, but does not include those children whose parent has remarried, or was not married to the person who died. Nor does it include those bereaved of a sibling.

Data from the Department of Work and Pensions shows that around 37000 parents are currently claiming Widowed Parents' Benefit. This does not give an indication of the number of children in these households. Nor does it include bereaved children in households which are not eligible for, or not claiming the benefit.

Proposed method of data collection

A simple question on whether the deceased had any dependent children could easily be added to the form for registering a death. This would allow the Registrar to collect reliable local data on the number of children and young people affected by the death of a parent. A similar question could be asked about siblings when a child's death is registered.

For more information or to discuss this proposal, please contact

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References

Green H, McGinnity A, Meltzer H, Ford T, Goodman, R. (2005) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain, 2004*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan