Title page

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New adolescent grief scales open new research possibilities: A commentary

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Word count excluding references:

813 words

Acknowledgments:

None

Conflict of interest:

None

All authors have agreed to the content and submission of the manuscript. The manuscript is solely the work of the authors, has not been previously published, and is not under consideration by another journal.

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Abstract

In this commentary, we highlight the availability of two newly developed instruments that measure grief in adolescents. We present similarities and differences regarding their content, factor structure, and characteristics of the validated populations. Given the small body of adolescent grief instruments, these two new scales will prove to be useful instruments to enhance our knowledge of grief and effectiveness of grief interventions in this population.

The field of adolescent grief for a long time has been hampered by a lack of designated instruments (Neimeyer & Harris, 2011). Substantial progress in overcoming that lack is evidenced in two recent pieces of research. In this journal, Hogan et al. (2019) published their research on the development of the short form (21 items) of the Hogan Inventory of Bereavement for Children and Adolescents (HIB-SF-CA), based on a sample of children ($N = 87$, $M_{\text{age}} = 12.21$ years, $SD = .58$) who had lost a sibling by cancer between 3 and 12 months before the study. The short form was derived from the 46-items Hogan Sibling Inventory of Bereavement (HSIB), developed with a sample ($N = 165$, aged 13-18 years) who had lost a sibling between 3 and 84 months before the study (Hogan & Greenfield, 1991). In turn, the 46-items HSIB had been derived from the original 109-item HSIB, which was based on a sample of adolescents ($N = 40$, $M_{\text{age}} = 15.2$ years, range 13-18) who had lost a sibling 3 to 36 months before the study (Hogan, 1987). Typically, the HIB/HSIB consists of two subscales: grief reactions and personal growth. Though these two factors appear to be valid for bereaved adolescents, it is likely that adolescent grief entails more constructs.

As the (46-item) HSIB was, to the best of our knowledge, the only adolescent general grief scale, we decided to empirically develop a contemporary, reliable and comprehensive grief instrument for adolescents, aged 12-18 years. While the qualitative and quantitative development and the psychometric characteristics of the “Adolescent Grief Inventory (AGI)” have been fully reported elsewhere (Andriessen et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2019a), we summarize the major characteristics here. The AGI, freely available from the authors, was developed with a sample ($N = 176$, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.87$, $SD = 3.89$, range 12-28) of adolescents who had lost a family member or a friend when they were aged between 12 and 18 years, and had experienced the loss between 6 months and 10 years before the study. The AGI comprises 40 items and 6 factors: 1. Sadness, 2.

Self-blame, 3. Anxiety and self-harm, 4. Shock, 5. Anger and betrayal, and 6. Sense of peace.

The AGI distinguished different groups, based on cause of death of the deceased person (natural death, suicide, other), kinship (1st degree family, other family, other), and participants' mental health status (having received a diagnosis, treatment, or having engaged in suicidal behaviour).

We found evidence of convergent validity of the AGI with the HSIB Grief subscale, the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and self-rated impact of the other's death (Andriessen et al., 2018a). Divergent validity was demonstrated with the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), expectedness of the death, and self-rated closeness with the deceased person. The study found also a weak positive correlation between the AGI and the HSIB subscale of Personal growth (Andriessen et al., 2018a). The study findings indicated that negative or grief-related aspects and positive or growth-related aspects are not opposites, which is in line with contemporary understandings of the grief dynamics (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

Both the AGI and HSIB included items regarding sadness, yearning, anxiety and guilt. However, the AGI addressed topics not covered by the HSIB, such as feelings of shock, anger, betrayal, self-blame, self-harm, and feelings of injustice and helplessness. Moreover, AGI Factor 6 entailed unique positive feelings such as gratitude and relief, which is reflected in divergent scores of this factor. For example, it correlated negatively with HSIB Grief, and correlated weakly with HSIB Personal Growth. Conversely, the HSIB Personal Growth factor included items not covered by the AGI regarding valuing self, others or life.

In summary, it seems that while there are some correlations and overlap between the HSIB and the AGI, there are differences in content, factor structure, and characteristics of the validated populations (such as age range, post-death time windows, type of relationship with the

deceased), providing choice to researchers depending on the research questions and target populations. We believe that these two newly developed instruments will prove to be valuable additions to the small body of adolescent grief instruments, and pave the way for much-needed high quality studies. They should prove useful to measure adolescent grief, relative to, for example, psychological, social or health related issues. In longitudinal studies of adolescent grief trajectories, they will help to determine the effect of interventions, which is largely uncharted research territory (Andriessen et al., 2019b).

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