



The Compassionate Friends Victoria Inc.

Bereaved Parent & Sibling Support & Information

Patron: Rhonda Galbally, AO

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MEDIA RELEASE

A report into the social impact and economic costs following the death of a child.

Parents estimate average lost income of \$59,500, which was directly related to the death of their child"

Authors Dr Jon Stebbins, D.Ed., Traumatic Bereavement Consultant & Researcher and Dr Trevor Batrouney, Adjunct Professor, RMIT University.

Parents are losing up to \$600,000 in lost income and take, on average, sixteen weeks of unpaid leave following the death of their child, according to a new report.

The report, *Beyond the Death of a Child*, identifies the social impacts and economic costs to families and the community during the first three years following the death of a child.

The report was launched today by Professor David de Kretser, AC, Governor of Victoria, at the State Library of Victoria, and praised by a leading researcher from the US.

The Compassionate Friends Victoria commissioned the two year research study which commenced in October 2004. The research was funded by a grant from The William Buckland Foundation

Almost half (46%) of the 103 bereaved families interviewed incurred significant medical, hospital and other health related costs (including counselling) and over 70 per cent of these experienced moderate to extreme difficulty in meeting such expenses.

One couple whose 21 year-old daughter was killed in a car accident had to stop counselling after just two sessions because of the costs. Only a reduced counselling charge and financial help from local churches allowed the counselling and other debts such as funeral costs to be met.

Of the 103 bereaved families interviewed for the report, 23 parents chose, or were forced, to resign from their employment following the death of a child.

Parents' estimates of their lost income varied from a low of \$2500 to a high of \$600,000 with an average of \$59,500.

Of the 39 family members who took leave without pay directly related to the death of their child or sibling 33 provided details of leave taken and estimates of income lost. The periods of leave taken varied from a low of two weeks to a high of two years and eight months, with an average leave without pay of 15.5 weeks that cost family members around \$8000 on average.

*A world wide family of bereaved parents caring for one another
Founded 1969 in England by Rev Dr Simon Stephens
Founded 1978 in Australia by Lindsay & Margaret Harmer*

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Almost three quarters of the family members indicated that the impact on their work performance was very or extremely significant.

Some 15 per cent of responses referred specifically to experiencing depression. A mother whose 19 year-old daughter Melinda died was only able to work part-time because of depression, anxiety and panic attacks.

Other problems included reduced tolerance, surges of sadness, lack of motivation and loss of concentration.

The report also put forward 20 recommendations directed to government and non-government bodies covering: bereavement support programs, economic costs, employment, education and research.

The report was undertaken by Dr Jon Stebbins and Dr Trevor Bartrouney, who between them have extensive experience in social research and working with bereaved families.

Launching the report, Professor David de Kretser said:

“I can imagine there is nothing as painful or extremely stressful as losing a child. This report goes a long way in trying to articulate the economic and social hardships that bereaved Victorian families face. For the first time, we have significant research that clearly shows that families need as much support as possible to recover from such a tragedy.”

The Compassionate Friends Victoria President, John Hurley, said:

“This report is the result of systematic research aimed at clearly articulating bereaved parents and siblings direct experiences following the death of a child. The Report and subsequent recommendations will provide the framework for future service planning and delivery for bereavement organisations.”

Emeritus Professor Dennis Klass of Webster University, St Louis, a leading researcher on bereavement, said of the report:

“Beyond the death of a child is ground breaking. The study expands our understanding of the effects of a child’s death well beyond the scope of the previous scholarly and clinical literature about bereaved parents and their families.

“When a child dies, we lose a part of our future, and that takes some getting used to. It is not a psychological syndrome. It is a life to be reorganised in light of the new and terrible reality.”

Two major research instruments were used in the study: an extensive questionnaire to 103 bereaved families and 17 interviews with members of seven families.

Two-thirds of the bereaved families lived in metropolitan Melbourne and one-third in regional Victoria. The majority of parents whose children had died were in their thirties and forties, that is, in mid-life and mid-career.

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The major causes of death were vehicular accidents; other accidents; suicide; SIDS; still-birth/miscarriage; cancer; and other chronic illnesses.

The Compassionate Friends Victoria is part of the worldwide family of bereaved parents. The not for profit organisation provides grief services such as a 24 hour telephone support line, monthly grief support groups and community education.

Funds for the study were secured from the William Buckland Foundation.

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To request a Four Page Fact Sheet, with statistical highlights of the report, the Report or for interview questions and requests, please contact: Laraine at The Compassionate Friends, 03 9888 4034 or email laraine@compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au

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