

Correspondence

From grieving to healing: moving forward a year after COVID-19

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the many complex and traumatic losses brought by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. During this crisis, it is important to grieve what has been lost, and it is also important to find meaning and hope in how life has changed. Conversely, there is no one size fits all formula for healing and coping with loss. Healing occurs in phases where one is moving in and out of different emotions. The saying ‘time heals all wounds’ is only partially correct because, for prolonged grief, time is not the solution.

Keywords COVID-19, grief, healing, rituals

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic has had profound impact on all aspects of human life. A recent correspondence rightly stated that hope is a ‘fundamental human response to loss and grief experiences in the time of COVID-19’.¹ Grief and its attendant rituals of mourning are expected and healthy adaptations to loss. However, given the social distancing, lockdowns, and limits on the size of in-person gatherings have changed the way friends and family can gather and grieve. A recent study found that some mourners are more emotionally resilient than others, and those who overcome their grief more quickly all have something very important in common. Following the loss, they performed what the researchers refer to as ‘rituals’ in the study.² Those who are grieving deeply or who are farther along in their healing are often trying to understand grief and its realities.³

Grieving is ‘an innate part of what it means to live a full and rich life as a human’.⁴ Moreover, I argue that grieving can take in ‘multiple forms’ since even those who have not lost loved ones are experiencing a level of loss and grief. Grieving the loss of a loved one taken by illness, loss of freedom and human rights, loss of attending a graduation ceremony, or loss of being able to complete a research project are examples that are valid and important to acknowledge in grief studies. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic may evoke grief on a more

complicated process⁵ than what people are used to during pre-COVID-19 pandemic. While some of the grief-stricken remain depressed for long periods of time—developing what is called ‘complicated grief’—most people move on. These losses can happen at the same, which can complicate grief process and delay one’s ability to adapt, heal and recover. A recent paper discusses the difficulties associated with loss, grief and healing in the time of COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted the importance of accompaniment to people experiencing the complicated grief process.⁶ This is because, on an individual level, the COVID-19 pandemic may differentially exacerbate anxiety and psychosis-like symptoms as well as lead to non-specific mental issues.⁷

A year after COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to grieve what has been lost, and it is also important to find meaning and hope in how life has changed. A powerful image would depict humanity’s grief that *The New York Times* dedicated its front page to a nearly a half-million dots in which each of the nearly 500 000 individual dots represents a life lost in the United States due to the coronavirus.⁸ No words can suffice to assuage the grief that humanity is facing at the moment because grief reactions are often all-consuming, excruciatingly painful, and highly impairing. Conversely, there is no one size fits all formula for healing and coping with loss. Healing occurs in phases where one is moving in and out of different

and multiple emotions. The saying ‘time heals all wounds’ is only partially correct because, for prolonged grief, time is not the solution.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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