Bereavement and depression: a review concerning the DSM-5

Filipa Novais¹ and Luís C. Pestana¹


Abstract

Introduction: One of the most significant decisions of the recent 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5) of the American Psychiatric Association was the elimination of bereavement exclusion criteria in Major Depressive Disorder. Some authors have seen this change as a positive development in psychiatry allowing early diagnosis and appropriate treatment of depressive syndromes that are associated with bereavement as significant life event. Others relate this change with another attempt to classify as pathological the normal human reactions.

Objectives: This work aims to review the validity of elimination of bereavement exclusion criterion in major depression in the new classification of the DSM-5.

Methods: In this study, we performed a search on the Anglo-Saxon literature. The EMBASE, MEDLINE and PubMed were consulted retrospectively by the year 1960, using the following key words: "bereavement", "depression", "DSM 5","ICD""criteria","mood disorders". A total of 20 articles were considered relevant to this review, including original research papers and review articles.

Results: Studies attempting to establish whether there are differences between depression associated with grief or not related to this event found some differences between patients. In depression associated with bereavement there was a higher probability of late onset, African-American ethnicity, less problems in social functioning, fewer symptoms of fatigue, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal ideation than in individuals with depression not related with bereavement. However, the similarities, in most studies, outweigh the differences and there are no randomized controlled studies that distinguish depression associated with bereavement from depression associated with any other significant event.

Discussion and Conclusions: Most studies seem to support the decision of the elimination of bereavement as exclusion criterion. However, major depressive disorder as defined by DSM 5 has yet to be definitively validated.