

Next Steps in Survivor Research: Studying Survivors in the Community at Large to Gain Better Insights Into Their Characteristics and Grieving Problems

Invited lecture · William Feigelman

Prof. William Feigelman, PhD, is Professor Emeritus Professor of Sociology from Nassau Community College (Garden City, New York), where he taught for 50 years. He is the author or co-author of seven books and more than 80 journal articles and has written on a wide variety of social science subjects including child adoptions, youth alcohol and drug abuse, problem gambling, tobacco use and cessation, and intergroup relations. Since 2002, after his son Jesse's suicide, Dr Feigelman has focused his professional writings on youth suicide and suicide bereavement. His bereavement and suicide writings have appeared in Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, Death Studies, Omega: Journal of Death and Dying, Archives of Suicide Research, Crisis, and Illness, Crisis and Loss. He is one of the authors of Devastating Losses: How Parents Cope with the Death of a Child to Suicide or Drugs (NY: Springer, 2012). He is a member of the American Association of Suicidology, the International Association of Suicide Prevention and the Association for Death Education and Counseling, a frequent presenter at bereavement conferences in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Norway and Japan, and a co-facilitator of a suicide survivors' support group. In 2019 Bill and his wife Beverly were chosen to receive the Farberow Award by IASP for their service and accomplishments in the field of suicide postvention. Bill feels greatly humbled to be a recipient of this award and deeply honoured to be chosen to serve as a SIG co-chair.

Abstract. The field of suicide bereavement research has moved with glacial slowness to acquire an understanding of the characteristics and extent of suicide bereavement. It took nearly 40 years to dispel the myth of six 'survivor-victims' affected by any single suicide, posited by Edwin Schneidman in 1973. Numerous quantitative studies such as Crosby and Sacks (2002) with national data and Cerel et al. (2013) with Kentucky data found evidence of much higher rates of suicide exposures and bereavements than those claimed by Schneidman. Yet, the myth still held firm for another five years until it was finally demolished by a great many more studies documenting mental heal-

th difficulties experienced by the suicide exposed and bereaved. Today, the slowness to acquire information on the suicide bereaved still remains, with the vast majority of studies of the bereaved based on convenience samples of treatment-involved survivors. We know very little about the bereaved from the community at large who may not be seeking treatment. We need to know how numerous are those who may not be seeking treatments; how are they managing; what are they relying upon to help them cope with the inherent difficulties associated with suicide survivorship. We are now embarked on completing a national study of 1,000 suicide-bereaved adults, examining their use of healing aids, mental health difficulties and post-loss adjustments to better illuminate this less well understood realm.