The role of spousal loss in the development of depressive symptoms in the elderly - implications for diagnostic systems.

In the revised version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) the Mood Disorder Workgroup for DSM-V the bereavement exclusion criterion for the diagnosis of major depression has been eliminated. To investigate the impact of bereavement on the incidence of depression and depressive symptoms in the elderly. Participants over 75 years from...
the longitudinal German Study on Ageing, Cognition, and Dementia in Primary Care Patients (AgeCoDe) that were still married at baseline were investigated (n=1,193). Data from four follow-ups (time frame: 6 years) were investigated. The response rate at baseline was 50.3%. Three clinical endpoints were analyzed: depressive symptoms according to Geriatric Depression Scale (1) GDS>=6, (2) GDS>=10, and (3) Major Depression (MD). The effect of loss was investigated using random-effects regression models. Experiencing a loss of spouse was predictive of a higher incidence in GDS>=6 (OR 4.52, 95% CI 2.6-7.9) and 10 (OR 5.59, 95% CI 1.8-17.0) even after adjusting for age, gender, impairment at baseline, and GDS score at baseline. Associations with MD were not significant (OR 1.77, 95% CI 0.9-3.5). Older adults experiencing the loss of their spouse are more likely to display elevated levels of depressive symptoms, that may reach a concerning level of severity.

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