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**GRIEF AND SOCIAL SUPPORT:
WHO DO BEREAVED INDIVIDUALS UTILISE FOR
SUPPORT?**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Sciences in Psychology
at Massey University

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1993

Dedicated to the
memory of my Mother,
Verna Florence Durbin
1926-1986

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate, using three theoretical perspectives of sociobiology, attachment and affiliation, who individuals go to for social support after the death of a close friend or relative. Based on the sociobiological literature it can be postulated that bereaved individuals will go to family for support. Attachment theory proposes that they will go to friends whereas affiliation theory suggests that people who have experienced a similar bereavement would be used for support. Based on the grief and social support research it was expected that bereaved individuals would go to a combination of supports and that female support givers would be used more than male supporters. It was also anticipated that bereaved females would use more supports than bereaved males. An added consideration was that bereaved individuals would use their partners for support. Thirty female and thirty male community based volunteers aged 20-70 were asked to complete a questionnaire at a time and place deemed appropriate for them. The questionnaire comprised items regarding demographics, and support from family, friends and people who have experienced a similar bereavement. The results revealed that bereaved individuals used a combination of support types but used more friend support after their bereavement than family or experienced person support. More female than male supports were used by both bereaved females and males. Bereaved females used significantly more supports than bereaved males. The majority of participants who had partners used them for their support. It was concluded that bereaved

individuals used more informal social supports, such as friends and family, than formal supports. Friends, including partners, were most often used. Significant gender differences were found in who the bereaved people approached for support.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Ross Flett, for his encouragement, assistance and willingness to pick up my thesis topic at such a late date. Without this my thesis would never have been written.

My thanks to Keith Tuffin for the encouragement and support through the long haul. Also thanks to Arnold Chamove for his initial input into my thesis.

I would like to thank also the many friends and colleagues who showed interest through their encouragement and support. Special thanks goes to Alan who gave me his complete support, encouragement and friendship and urged me to carry on when I had all but given up. My thanks to Claire who proof read and was a sounding board as well as a good friend. Thanks also to Karyn and Margaret for their support and friendship through the good times and the bad times. Thanks to my family, Carole, Annemarie and Dad.

Finally, thank you to all the subjects without who this thesis would not have been possible.

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