

Life Without Mom: Understanding Developmental Challenges

by

Samantha, G, Oakes

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APPROVED BY

Sonia Plewa, M.C., R.C.C., Capstone Supervisor, Master of Counselling Faculty

Tatiana Santini, M.A., R.P., R.C.C., S.E.P., Faculty Reader, Master of Counselling Faculty

School of Health and Social Sciences

Abstract

Maternal loss profoundly impacts adolescent development, yet tailored support for motherless daughters in Canada is scarce. This paper examines the unique challenges faced by adolescent motherless daughters, critiques existing support structures, and proposes a specialized therapeutic program, "Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters." Chapter One introduces the research problem and outlines the research objectives, emphasizing the need for age-specific interventions. Chapter Two reviews literature on grief, adolescence, and the continuing bonds theory, highlighting the developmental and emotional complexities of maternal loss. Chapter Three discusses a proposed therapeutic program, drawing from Irvin D. Yalom's group therapy principles and Mary Hedtke's continuing bonds approach. Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's, a therapeutic group designed for girls aged 13-18, aims to provide peer support, and honor the enduring influence of mothers through a six-week program. Ethical and cultural considerations ensure inclusivity and respect for diverse grieving processes. This study highlights the importance of developing targeted, culturally sensitive support systems for motherless daughters, advocating for further research and programs to address this critical gap in mental health services.

Keywords: maternal loss, motherless daughters, peer support, group therapy, continuing bonds

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mother, Leah. Forever my inspiration, even in her absence.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The loss of one's mother as a young girl is an instrumental life event that radically shifts the trajectory of her life. The focus of this research is centered around the impact a mother's death has on their adolescent children throughout their life, specifically the daughters of these deceased women. Research into gender differences suggests that parental attachments, particularly maternal relationships, are more significant in female identity formation compared to male (Josselson, 1987; Samuolis et al., 2001). Therefore, the early loss of one's mother is expected to be more disruptive to the sense of self for females. Additionally, research suggests that the death of a mother may have more problematic effects on daughters in contrast to sons, with maternal loss associated with greater odds of binge drinking, greater decline in self-esteem, and lower level of personal mastery for daughters than sons (Marks, Jun, & Song, 2007).

Overview of the Topic

Regardless of the serious impact maternal loss shows to have on girls, only in the past few decades have we seen changes in how current literature examines the emotional complexities of grief and loss, particularly for adolescent girls. Within this research, an investigation of the current literature concerning the population of motherless daughters and how maternal death has a unique impact on this population will be conducted. Honing in on the specifics of this population, the author of this paper will explore the impacts of maternal loss by investigating the age one experiences her mother's death. The author of this paper believes this aspect of one's identity has a major impact on how one will react to and process her mother's death. An exploration of the impact of maternal death will be conducted, examining various age groups in terms of common reactions and experiences. Edelman's book *Motherless daughters: the legacy of loss* (1994) provides a significant exploration of the impact of losing one's mother

at a young age. Edelman wrote this book based on her own experiences of losing her mother at the age of seventeen and interviewed numerous women who had also experienced maternal loss throughout childhood and adolescence. The book delves into various aspects of grief, identity formation, and the challenges faced by those who grow up without their mothers. The author identifies developmental stages of a motherless daughter's life, dividing these stages into early childhood (age six and younger), late childhood (age six to twelve), and adolescence (thirteen to eighteen). The current literature concerning the age of maternal loss will be explored with the intention of better understanding the population of motherless daughters and the unique impact of maternal loss on daughters of varying ages.

Purpose Statement

Throughout our childhood, we see our parents as figures who will always be there regardless of any negative situation in our lives. Specifically, we often look to our mothers as our primary caregivers (Umemura, Jacobvitz, Messina, & Hazen, 2013) and perceive their presence to be unconditional and unwavering. When this figure is taken from us, and we experience maternal loss, our assumptions about the world and the availability of others are shattered (Harris & Winokeur, 2019). The death of one's mother is a unique experience that impacts development, with many different factors involved leading to unique reactions and ways of processing this death. Emotional development can be profoundly affected, as individuals may grapple with feelings of sadness, denial, and anger, which can shape their emotional responses and coping mechanisms (Edelman, 1994; Wolfelt, 2004; Dyregrov, 2008). Additionally, psychological development may be influenced as individuals navigate their place in the world in the absence of maternal guidance and support (Edelman, 1994). Social and interpersonal development may also be impacted, as relationships with family members and peers may shift or evolve in response to

the loss with motherless daughters learning new ways of relating to others and forming connections without their mother's presence and influence (Edelman, 1994). With an interest in this topic due to personally experiencing maternal loss, the population of motherless daughters will be investigated. Specifically, How does the age at which someone loses their mother affect their grieving process?

Following maternal loss children (ages six to twelve) are confronted with profound emotional challenges. Dyregrov (2008) suggests that motherless daughters within this age group frequently grapple with a range of complex emotions, including confusion, longing, and a persistent belief in the possibility of their mother's return. According to Edelman (1994), caregivers of motherless daughters in this age group frequently encounter persistent inquiries about their mother's whereabouts and the possibility of her return, underscoring the importance of recognizing and understanding these repetitive inquiries as they serve as integral components of their coping process, reflecting their need for reassurance and comprehension. Additionally, regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and seeking comfort objects emerge as prevalent responses to distress among these children, as highlighted by Dyregrov (2008) and Levins (n.d). These behaviors are often seen as adaptive strategies aimed at seeking solace and security in the absence of their mother's presence, underscoring the multifaceted nature of their grief experience. This insight into the coping mechanisms of young children following maternal loss underscores the distinct nature of their grief experience compared to older children.

Adolescents face particularly unique challenges in processing maternal loss. Dyregrov (2008) notes that adolescents possess the cognitive ability to think hypothetically, enabling them to reflect on a future without their mother. During adolescence, individuals develop cognitive skills such as hypothetical reasoning, enabling them to consider different possible outcomes or

courses of action when faced with a problem (Garanito & Zaher-Rutherford, 2019; Hein et al., 2015). This cognitive development allows them to contemplate significant life milestones, such as graduation and weddings, and the absence of a maternal presence during these events.

Adolescents may also experience complex grief responses, including feelings of guilt and regret regarding their relationship with their mother prior to her death (Edelman, 1994; Andriessen et al., 2020). Additionally, Lovelace and Smith (2002) suggest that adolescents may initially react to maternal loss with shock and disbelief, presenting as numbness. Some motherless daughters may resort to repressing their emotions, manifesting in risk-seeking behaviors or conflicts with family members (Edelman, 1994; Dyregrov, 2008). Additionally, substance abuse rates are higher among adolescents who have experienced loss (Hamdan et al., 2013). Teenage girls are more likely to turn to a friend for support through their grief than any other source of support (Edelman, 1994), but often, the discussion of maternal loss causes discomfort and resistance. A girl's peers are often unable to validate her feelings, leaving her feeling lost in her grief.

Adolescent girls live in a social landscape with rules on how to conform in order to 'fit in' with others. Bereaving daughters feel anger, denial, and depression, often seen as 'negative' emotions in women. Youth who exhibit rage are not keeping with traditional feminine behaviors. An adolescent who has lost her mother wants other females to like her, therefore the girl who thinks her mother's death will make her appear different or abnormal will often avoid talking about the loss or revealing any 'negative' emotions to her friends (Lovelace, & Smith, 2002). It is crucial to recognize and address the variability in how motherless daughters express their emotions, particularly within the context of societal expectations and gender norms (Edelman, 1994).

Providing guidance and support tailored to their individual needs can help adolescent motherless daughters navigate the complex emotional landscape of grief.

Understanding the experiences of motherless daughters throughout their childhood and adolescence could be beneficial for a wide range of individuals, especially those who have close relationships with these girls. It is important for remaining guardians and other adults who are close to motherless daughters to truly understand the impact of their mother's death on their emotional well-being, and how they can best support them during each stage of their development. Research indicates that the presence of a social-support figure can reduce psychological and physiological responses to threats, such as maternal loss (Hornstein, & Eisenberger, 2017). Young girls without mothers need social support figures in their grieving process as well as in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Additionally, school teachers and educational staff hold an important role as Burns and Hoagwood (2002) estimated that 75% of mental health services provided to youth are delivered in school settings. Additionally, in a 2012 study of American high schools, 70% of teachers had at least one student who has lost a parent or sibling in the past year (American Federation of Teachers and the New York Life Foundation, 2012). As many of these girls often have no adults to look up to after this death, educational staff may be the only adult support outside their immediate family. It is important that educational staff are knowledgeable on the signs of grief in children, and that those interacting with motherless daughters know how to be there for these kids and support them, as these moments could be influential for child development.

Motherless daughters themselves are the ideal population which the author of this paper believes would benefit from this research. Drawing from personal experience as a motherless daughter, the author recognizes the intricate nature of grief and the profound impact of losing a mother at a young age, and how this knowledge may be beneficial for other motherless daughters. Providing knowledge on the impact and variability of maternal grief may help girls

who are struggling through the loss of their mom and normalize their grieving process. Edelman (1994) states that after publishing her book *Motherless daughters: the legacy of loss*, many women were eager to join together with one woman stating, “It’s like we share a secret handshake” (p.17). It would be helpful for these girls to have a source of guidance and a space where they can create a community of other girls and women who have lost their mom and that understand and share similarities in their experiences.

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2 employs attachment theory as a foundational framework to examine the emotional responses, psychological adjustments, and changes in attachment patterns experienced by motherless daughters. This theory provides a lens through which to understand how maternal loss disrupts the secure base typically provided by the maternal bond and influences the formation of attachment patterns. By integrating attachment theory into the analysis, Chapter 2 offers insights into the nuanced dynamics of the grieving process among motherless daughters, guiding the development of targeted interventions and support strategies outlined in subsequent chapters. This theoretical lens not only informs the analysis but also informs the development of practical strategies and interventions outlined in Chapter 3, aimed at supporting motherless daughters through their formative years.

Continuing Bonds Theory is an additional relevant and insightful framework within the scope of this topic. Developed by Klass, Silverman, and Nickman in 1996, this theory emphasizes the ongoing relationship individuals maintain with the deceased (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Continuing Bonds Theory offers a perspective on how motherless daughters navigate and cope with this profound loss. It acknowledges the enduring nature of the bond with a girl and her deceased mother, highlighting the importance of allowing children and adolescents

to maintain a connection with her even after death (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). This perspective resonates deeply in my research, as it underscores the significance of honoring and preserving the memories of the deceased mother in the lives of motherless daughters and provides valuable insights into the complex and multifaceted ways in which motherless daughters express their grief and find meaning in the aftermath of maternal loss (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Integrating Continuing Bonds Theory offers a compassionate lens through which to explore the profound impact of maternal loss on the lives of motherless daughters, highlighting the importance of sustaining connections with the deceased mother in their grieving and healing journey.

Contribution to the Field

Motherless daughters are an under-researched population despite the need for understanding the unique complexities of their grieving process. Approximately 1 in 7 children living in Western countries will experience the death of a parent or sibling before they turn 20 (Pileggi, 2022), and 3% of children aged 1 to 17 have experienced the death of a parent or sibling (Statistics Canada, 2022), and yet only 1 in 5 bereaved youth will receive any sort of formal support for their grief (Dowdney, 2017). Children are best supported when they have social support figures who fully understand their developmental needs and abilities, and this is especially true for young girls who have lived through the trauma of losing their closest support figure, their mother. It is crucial that knowledge on how to support motherless daughters is readily available for those providing care for these girls, as well as motherless daughters themselves who are seeking guidance in their experience.

Research on motherless daughters is scarce, and even fewer studies have focused on how their grieving process is influenced by their developmental age. Current research on parental loss

is lacking literature concerning the uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship and the impacts of maternal loss. Young girls who suffer from this loss have few models to guide them through their grief. Additionally, there is a lack of research regarding the impact of maternal loss specifically concerning developmental age. Most of the current literature examines these factors in the context of parental loss, with a lack of focus on maternal loss. One piece of literature truly encompasses the motherless daughter experience but was written almost two decades ago.

Edelman (1994) wrote her book *Motherless Daughters: the legacy of loss* after losing her mother at 17 years old, unable to find guidance in losing your mother and how this death is processed.

Edelman (1994) interviewed hundreds of motherless daughters with unique experiences, exploring the countless ways losing a mother affects every aspect of a woman's life. This book contains one chapter dedicated to the developmental stages of a daughter's life at the time of maternal loss. This chapter delves into the unique challenges and coping mechanisms associated with different developmental stages, shedding light on how maternal loss can shape identity, relationships, and emotional well-being across the lifespan. Lovelace & Smith (2002) review the existing adolescent literature concerning motherless daughters, noting that only recently have we seen a marked change in how adolescent literature examines grief and loss, particularly for bereaving girls. Two other significant resources do not specifically center on motherless daughters; rather, they explore grief experiences in children and adolescents. Dyregrov's (2008) *Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults* is a comprehensive resource aimed at providing guidance and support to adults navigating the complexities of childhood grief. While it does not focus specifically on motherless daughters, this book offers information on the grieving process of children and adolescents. It covers various aspects of grief experienced by children, including their understanding and expression of grief, common reactions and behaviors, and effective

strategies for supporting them through the grieving process. Additionally, the book includes a chapter outlining the impact of parental loss on children, providing valuable insights into how bereavement affects young individuals. Similarly, Wolfelt's (2004) *A Child's View of Grief: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Counselors* offers valuable insights into understanding and supporting children through the grieving process. While it does not focus specifically on motherless daughters, this guide provides comprehensive information on grief from a child's perspective. The book addresses various aspects of children's grief, including their emotional experiences and common reactions to loss. Lovelace & Smith (2002) review the existing adolescent literature concerning motherless daughters, noting that only recently have we seen a marked change in how adolescent literature examines grief and loss, particularly for bereaving girls. The following research on this population is limited with a need for further research investigating the unique experiences of motherless daughters of varying age groups.

Reflectivity and Positionality Statement

Researching the impact of maternal loss on young girls is important to the author of this paper due to the personal nature of this topic. As a motherless daughter, the author has been inspired to learn about and eventually work with other girls and women who have lost their moms. When the author was 11, her mother passed away due to a heart attack in her sleep. The author's whole world was shattered and turned upside down due to this sudden loss. Her mother was the glue that held her family together, and it was difficult to navigate life and adjust after losing someone who held such a large role in her life. Reflecting on this experience, the author realizes that losing her mom has deeply influenced her sense of self. From a young age, she internalized the role of the "girl without a mom," a label that has become an integral part of her identity. Edelman (1994) states that a girl who loses her mother during childhood co-opts the loss

into her emerging personality, where it becomes a defining characteristic of her personality. This rings true for the author; her mother's absence has not only shaped how she views herself but has also influenced how she approaches relationships, challenges, and milestones in life. Researching motherless daughters is personally important as the author is interested in understanding the unique impact maternal loss has on daughters in varying age groups. Specifically, understanding the literature concerning the relationship between a mother's death and one's age may help her gain clarity on her own experience of loss.

The author is interested in researching the topic of motherless daughters as she desires a deeper understanding of the impact of losing your mother at both childhood and adolescence. Within her family, she is a 'middle' child, with one younger sister (2 years younger) and one older sister (6 years older). This means she experienced her own grief response as an 11-year-old girl, and also observed the grief experience of her 9-year-old and 16-year-old sisters. Differences in grieving styles began to emerge, and she has noticed major differences in how she grieves compared to her siblings. For example, throughout her grieving process, she more commonly expresses 'loss-oriented' grief, tending to emotionally ruminate about the death of her mom (Harris & Winokeur, 2019), whereas she notices her older sister more commonly in a state of 'restoration-oriented' grief, restricting emotional expressions of distress (Harris & Winokeur, 2019). Additionally, the age that one experiences their mother's death can be detrimental to how one processes their grief. For the author of this paper, losing her mother at the age of 11 marked a critical juncture in her life, where she was just beginning to form her sense of self and understand the world around her. As an 11-year-old, she was just beginning to comprehend the complexities of life, and her mother's death forced her to confront the harsh reality of mortality far sooner than she was prepared for. For an older child, such as her 16-year-old sister, the

process of grief may be different due to their developmental stage. At 16, adolescents are typically more cognitively mature and have a better grasp of abstract concepts, including death (Dyregrov, 2008). They may have a deeper understanding of the permanence of loss and the finality of death compared to younger children (Dyregrov, 2008). However, this does not necessarily make the grieving process any easier as teenagers are often undergoing significant changes in their lives, such as transitioning to adulthood, navigating relationships, and exploring their own identities. The loss of a mother during this pivotal stage can intensify feelings of loneliness and isolation as the motherless daughter grapples with the urge to belong while also attempting to convey her grief to peers. The author finds it interesting to ponder how her identity and emotional landscape might have been shaped differently if her mother had passed away at ages 5, 15, or 19 instead of at 11. As a motherless daughter herself, focusing her research on this population is important as it may provide the author guidance and understanding in her own grief experience, as well as equip her with the knowledge needed to help other struggling motherless daughters. As an eleven-year-old girl without her mom, she felt helpless in the world and she hopes that by imparting the knowledge she finds to others she is able to help other young girls who feel alone in the world without their mom.

As a motherless daughter who has also chosen the path of professional counseling, the author's positionality is deeply rooted in the intertwining of her personal experiences and professional calling. Having walked the path of grief and resilience following the loss of her mother, the author carries within her a profound understanding of the emotional upheaval that accompanies such a significant loss. Her own journey with the loss of her mother and grief throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood shapes the way she approaches her work with clients, allowing her to empathize deeply with the pain of loss and grief as a lifelong process.

The author's decision to pursue a career in counseling was not just a professional choice, but also a deeply personal one. It stemmed from a desire to turn her own experiences of loss into something meaningful and healing for others. Every day, she draws upon the lessons learned from her own grief to guide and empower her clients as they confront their own challenges and seek paths toward healing. In her counseling practice, the author is keenly aware of the profound impact that her own experiences may have on the therapeutic relationship. She approaches each session with self-awareness, recognizing that her personal journey of loss may influence the way she perceives and responds to her clients' experiences. The author's positionality as a motherless daughter and a professional counselor is a testament to the transformative power of turning pain into purpose. Through her work with clients, the author strives to honor the memory of her mother by offering compassion, understanding, and hope to those who are grappling with their own losses and seeking paths toward healing and resilience.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence

The transitional stage of physical and psychological development between childhood and adulthood, typically characterized by hormonal changes and social and emotional growth. For the purpose of this paper adolescence is limited to ages twelve to eighteen.

Attachment theory

A psychological framework that explores how early relationships, particularly with primary caregivers, influence emotional and social development (Bowlby, 1969).

Bereavement

The process of feeling a loved one's absence, 'bereft' of their presence (Lawrence, 2019).

Caretaking role

The responsibilities associated with providing physical or emotional care for others, often within a familial context.

Depression

A mental health condition characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities.

Developmental stage

The age or stage of life at which an individual experiences a significant event or change.

Grief

The internal emotional reaction to a loss, often caused by the death of a loved one (Lawrence, 2019).

Identity formation

The process through which individuals develop a sense of self and understanding of who they are.

Immediate mental health consequences

The psychological effects experienced shortly after the occurrence of a significant event, such as maternal loss.

Insecure attachment

A type of attachment characterized by anxiety or avoidance in relationships due to inconsistent or unavailable caregiving (Bowlby, 1969).

Maternal loss

The death of one's mother.

Motherless daughters

Female-identifying individuals who have experienced the loss of their mother before the age of 21 (Edelman, 1994).

Peer relationships

Interactions and connections with individuals of similar age or status, often outside of familial or authority-based relationships.

Regression

A coping mechanism characterized by reverting to earlier, less mature behaviors or ways of coping in response to stress or trauma.

Social norms

Shared expectations and behaviors within a society or group, influencing individual conduct and interactions.

Outline of the Capstone Project Chapters

Chapter 2 of the capstone project endeavors to provide a comprehensive exploration of the immediate mental health consequences experienced by girls who have endured the loss of their mothers. This chapter examines factors including emotional responses, psychological adjustments, changes in attachment patterns, and age-based differentiation in the grieving process of motherless daughters. By reviewing existing literature and synthesizing research findings, Chapter 2 aims to illuminate the multifaceted experiences of motherless daughters. The overarching goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how these experiences manifest across diverse age cohorts, thereby informing targeted interventions and support mechanisms tailored to the specific needs of motherless daughters of these various age groups.

Chapter 3 marks a transition from theoretical exploration to practical application within the context of supporting motherless daughters, with a specific focus on addressing the needs of

adolescent daughters coping with maternal loss. Recognizing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by motherless daughters, particularly during the tumultuous years of adolescence, this chapter endeavors to develop a specialized therapeutic group program tailored to meet the unique social and emotional needs of adolescent motherless daughters ages thirteen to eighteen. Adolescence is a period marked by heightened self-awareness, peer influence, and identity formation, all of which can be significantly impacted by the absence of a mother figure (Edelman, 1994). Therefore, the decision to concentrate on this demographic is grounded in the understanding that adolescence presents unique challenges for motherless daughters to navigate. By honing in on the specific experiences of adolescent motherless daughters, this therapeutic group program aims to provide a supportive environment where participants can explore their grief, share their stories, and connect with peers who understand their journey. Through facilitated discussions, activities, and peer interactions, participants will be empowered to process their emotions, develop coping strategies, and foster meaningful connections within a safe and nurturing community of mutual understanding and experience. Ultimately, the goal of this therapeutic group is to offer teenage motherless daughters the tools and support they need to navigate the complexities of adolescence while honoring and preserving the legacy of their mothers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The loss of a mother is a profoundly impactful and emotionally complex experience for children and teenagers, particularly girls (Edelman, 1994). Among different types of deaths, the death of one's parent presents the greatest consequences for youth (Dyregrov, 2008). This literature review delves into the immediate mental health consequences that girls experience following maternal loss, with a specific focus on how these consequences differ across various age groups. Drawing from a range of scholarly sources, this review provides a thematic analysis of existing research. While recognizing that several factors may contribute to variations in girls' immediate responses to maternal loss, including socioeconomic status, cultural background, family support systems, and the circumstances surrounding the loss itself (Dyregrov, 2008), this review hones in on the significant role of age. It explores the intricate web of emotions and behaviours that girls confront during the immediate aftermath of losing their mothers and how these responses evolve as they progress through childhood and adolescence. By understanding these differences in the grieving process across age groups, we can better tailor support and interventions to meet the unique needs of girls who have lost their mothers during their formative years.

Immediate Mental Health Consequences

Emotional Responses

Maternal loss elicits a complex range of emotional responses in girls (Edelman, 1994). Motherless daughters may experience a range of intense emotions following losing their mother, including anger and resentment, abandonment, fear, and guilt (Edelman, 1994). Additionally, Lovelace and Smith (2002) state that the loss of a mother can trigger intense grief and sadness. These emotional reactions can be overwhelming and difficult to understand and process,

especially for young children whose ability to regulate emotions is underdeveloped (Dyregrov, 2008), and since they do not have the understanding to deal with death (Edelman, 1994).

Depending on the circumstances of death, different emotions may be preeminent (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). Underneath explosive emotions such as anger or sadness, are primary feelings of pain, such as powerlessness, and hurt caused by the death of one's mother (Wolfelt, 2004).

Within this subtheme, anger, denial, and depression as an emotional response following maternal death will be explored.

Anger

Anger is a common emotional response following maternal death, that is often directed toward anything and anyone. Wolfelt (2004) states that a youth's anger may be directed toward a surviving parent, a teacher, one's friends, God, or the world in general. According to Dyregrov (2008), children often direct their anger externally toward others for not having prevented the death, as well as internally within oneself for not doing more to prevent her mother's death. Additionally, Dyregrov (2008) states that children associate their thoughts, feelings, or actions with the cause of one's death more than adults. Both younger and older children act out in anger as a result of their grief (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). Younger children may be more direct in their anger, making statements regarding who is at fault for the death (Dyregrov, 2008). This type of reaction in young children may be a result of their lack of abstract knowledge surrounding death (Edelman, 1994). Conversely, older children may express their anger in less direct ways, often displaced onto unrelated people or objects (Dyregrov, 2008). Through anger, motherless daughters may act in ways to try to bring their mom back to life. (Dyregrov, 2008). Wolfelt (2004) shares that explosive emotions such as anger serve as both a means of protesting the painful loss of one's mother in an effort to restore the lost relationship, and as reality-testing

'experiments' to help them process the death and find peace. The inability to change the situation following emotional outbursts can further fuel one's anger (Dyregrov, 2008). As explosive emotions such as anger are often manifestations of primary emotions such as powerlessness (Wolfelt, 2004), an inability to bring one's mother back following emotional outbursts may heighten one's perception of powerlessness over the loss of their mother, further fueling the anger (Dyregrov, 2008). Although distressing for motherless daughters, the fact that one's mother does not come back, despite episodes of explosive anger, aids children in their understanding of the finality of death (Wolfelt, 2004). Children who either do not allow themselves to express anger outwardly, may turn this anger inward, resulting in further consequences such as low self-esteem and depression (Wolfelt, 2004).

Drawing upon the continuing bonds theory, which states that individuals seek to maintain connections with their deceased loved ones (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014), it becomes apparent that anger can serve as a form of protest against the rupture of these bonds. The continuing bonds theory illuminates how anger can also serve as a means of preserving the relationship with the deceased mother (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). By expressing anger, motherless daughters assert the significance of their bond with their mothers, refusing to let go of the connection despite physical separation (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Anger reflects both the injustice of their loss and the enduring bond with their deceased mothers (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). By recognizing and validating the legitimacy of their anger within the framework of continuing bonds theory, caregivers and support systems can offer empathetic support and facilitate the healing process for motherless daughters.

Drawing from personal experience, the author of this paper can attest to the profound impact of anger following the loss of a mother. At the age of 11, when her mother passed away,

the author found herself grappling with overwhelming feelings of anger that seemed to erupt unexpectedly, even in seemingly innocuous situations. A simple inconvenience, like misplacing an item could trigger explosive outbursts of frustration and rage. In retrospect, the author realizes that these seemingly disproportionate reactions were manifestations of the deeper anguish and powerlessness she felt in the absence of my mother's presence. Like many children navigating the aftermath of maternal loss, her experience underscores the complexity of anger as a response to grief. Through her own journey, the author came to understand that anger served as both a shield against the pain of loss and an attempt to regain control over a situation she could not change.

Denial

Initially, some girls may deny the reality of the loss of their mother (Dyregrov, 2008). This can be manifested in various ways such as avoiding discussing the loss (Edelman, 1994), or a lack of feelings following the loss (Wolfelt, 2004). Denial in this context can be seen as the motherless daughter's way of temporarily pushing away the knowledge their mom is no longer alive (Wolfelt, 2004). For motherless daughters, denial is a defense mechanism that provides temporary relief from the overwhelming emotions following the loss of their mother (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). Following maternal loss, motherless daughters turn to denial as a means of processing the finality of their mother's death, keeping reality at a certain psychological distance in order to take in the emotional magnitude of the loss gradually (Dyregrov, 2008). Edelman, (1994) echoed this statement, adding that avoidance of the loss of one's mother is often associated with fantasies of the parent's return. Although this coping mechanism may serve to protect motherless daughters from their grief, denial has been found to lead to delayed grief processing (Goldstein, 2023). When motherless daughters express denial as a means of

protecting themselves from painful feelings, these emotions get ‘frozen’ until they are ready to process it (Goldstein, 2023). Conversely, over time many girls who initially respond to maternal loss with denial gradually transition toward a more comprehensive understanding and acceptance of the loss when provided a safe environment characterized by open communication with the family regarding the loss, allowing the motherless daughter to openly express their emotions and gradually develop a new understanding of the loss with increasing age (Dyregrov, 2008).

Within the framework of the continuing bonds theory, denial can be understood as a manifestation of the enduring connection between mother and daughter, as individuals grapple with the inconceivable reality of their mother's absence (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014).. Despite the physical separation, the bond between mother and daughter persists (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014), compelling motherless daughters to resist the finality of death and cling to the hope of reunion. Denial serves as a testament to the enduring bond between mother and daughter, as motherless daughters strive to maintain a sense of connection with their deceased mothers (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). In denying the finality of death, motherless daughters affirm the enduring nature of their relationship, clinging to the hope of continued interaction and communication with their mothers. Within this framework, denial can be seen as a form of adaptive coping, allowing motherless daughters to navigate the complexities of grief while preserving their emotional connection to their mothers (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014).

As a motherless daughter the author can relate to the initial instinct of denial following the loss of a mother. When her own mother passed away, she found herself grappling with a profound sense of disbelief. Despite the finality of her passing, it almost felt as though her mother was simply away at the grocery store and would return home at any moment. Just as she

struggled to accept the permanence of my mother's absence, many motherless daughters initially cling to the hope of their mother's imminent return, shielding themselves from the painful truth (Wolfelt, 2004).

Depression

Maternal loss can lead to depressive symptoms, including persistent sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities (Edelman, 1994). It is crucial to first differentiate grief and depression. Grief is a natural response to loss, while depression is a persistent mental health condition (Des Marais, 2022). Grief involves a range of emotions related to the specific circumstances of the loss, while depression is characterized by a pervasive sense of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities (Des Marais, 2022). While grief is a normal response to loss, it can sometimes evolve into depression when the individual struggles to adapt to the loss over an extended period, experiencing persistent low mood impacting their daily life (Des Marais, 2022). Motherless daughters first experience feelings of grief and sadness as they come to terms with the finality of their mother's death (Wolfelt, 2004). Motherless daughters are forced to grapple with a deep sense of loss, longing for their mothers, and the inability to share their lives with them (Edelman, 1994). Within a supportive environment where the motherless daughter feels safe expressing these feelings of grief, the intervals between grief responses lengthen over time (Edelman, 1994).

Within the context of continuing bonds theory, depression may be viewed as a natural outgrowth of the ongoing relationship between mother and daughter, as individuals strive to maintain a sense of connection and intimacy with their deceased mothers (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). By acknowledging and expressing their grief through depression, motherless

daughters affirm the enduring significance of their relationship with their mothers, even in death (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014).

Many factors play a role in the development of depression in motherless daughters, including an inability to understand and process their emotions within a safe environment (Wolfelt, 2004). Research indicating a link between maternal loss and the development of depression have been found. Pham et al. (2018) found that children who lose a parent face an increased likelihood of developing depression with an elevated risk of depression being more prevalent within the first two years following their parent's death. Dyregrov (2008) found an association between the loss of a parent and an elevated risk for developing depression. Edelman, (1994) stated that losing a mother has a greater impact on children than losing a father because it entails more significant changes in their daily lives, including the emotional toll of losing a primary caregiver and the implications on their psychological, social, and practical well-being. Mckay et. al (2021) found a positive association between losing a parent before 18 years old and developing a mood disorder. Lastly, Kendler, Sheth, Gardner & Prescott (2002) found that maternal death was associated with an elevated risk of developing depression, although this risk diminished approximately 10 years after the loss.

Psychological Adjustment

Maternal loss necessitates psychological adjustments, including redefining self-identity (Edelman, 1994). Research into gender differences suggests that parental attachments, particularly maternal relationships, are more significant in female identity formation compared to male (Josselson, 1987; Samuolis et al., 2001). Therefore, the early loss of one's mother is expected to be more disruptive to the sense of self for females. A motherless daughter who loses their mother during their youth will merge the loss into her personality, making this a defining

characteristic of her identity (Edelman, 1994). Edelman, (1994) states, "Losing my mother wasn't just a fact about me. It was the core of my identity, my very state of being" (p.17).

As the author of this paper has transitioned from childhood to adolescence and now into young adulthood, she increasingly defines herself as "the girl without the mom." This label colored her perceptions of herself, influencing how she interacted with others and viewed her place in the world. This identity has persisted throughout her life, shaping her relationships and self-perception. Despite the challenges the author faces holding this identity, she has learned to embrace this aspect of herself as a testament to her resilience and strength. It serves as a constant reminder of the bond she shared with her mother and the profound impact her absence has had on shaping who she is today.

Conversely, some motherless daughters reject defining themselves as the child without the mother, developing an identity independent from her past (Edelman, 1994). Often these girls will find comfort in what she thinks she can control, leading to challenges such as eating disorders and/ or addictions as a way to gain control of her body and/ or environment (Edelman, 1994). Some motherless daughters may re-identify themselves with their lost mother, behaving in ways characteristic of their mom (Dyregrov, 2008). This may be seen as an unconscious means of consoling family members, or as an attempt to receive love in the role of the deceased (Dyregrov, 2008). As they mature, some motherless daughters may continue to identify with immature aspects of herself as a way to hold onto what she has left of her mother, denying the finality of her death (Edelman, 1994). Growing up for these motherless daughters may feel a part of them stuck searching for something they are unable to replicate.

Within the framework of the continuing bonds theory, psychological adjustment can be understood as an ongoing negotiation between the past and present, as motherless daughters

strive to reconcile their memories, attachments, and identities in the absence of their mothers (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Central to the continuing bonds theory is the notion that the relationship between mother and daughter endures beyond death (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014), influencing motherless daughters' sense of self as they navigate their grief. Psychological adjustment is linked to the ongoing emotional bond between mother and daughter (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014), as motherless daughters seek to maintain a sense of connection and intimacy with their deceased mothers. Through rituals, memories, and symbolic gestures, motherless daughters honor and commemorate the enduring significance of their relationship with their mothers, integrating their presence into their sense of self and identity.

It has also been found that maternal loss can influence girls' self-esteem (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017). When we think about our mothers, they often symbolize a primary source of love and nurturing in our lives. However, it's important to acknowledge that not everyone experiences unconditional love from their mothers. Nonetheless, for those who do, the sudden loss of a mother can result in a profound void in their lives. When this source of nurturing love is suddenly taken away through maternal loss, it can leave a profound void in a girl's life. Without the nurturing and care from their mother, one may begin to question their self-worth and value in the absence of such foundational love and support. This questioning of self-esteem can contribute to mental health concerns, as low self-esteem has been linked to an increased risk of depressive symptoms (Orth & Robins, 2013).

After the loss of one's mother as a caregiver, motherless daughters often take over the role their mother once held in their family (Dyregrov, 2008). Wolfelt (2004) identified this as 'Big-Woman' syndrome, where the motherless daughter matures in order to fill the role of their lost mother. Girls, more so than boys, are forced into a caretaking role following maternal loss

due to a cultural climate which identifies caretaking duties as ‘woman’s work’ (Edelman, 1994). Many times, even when an older brother lives at home, the daughter is expected to step into the woman’s role. In this sense, the motherless daughter quickly shifts to a later stage in development, focusing her to mature at a time where she needs to be taken care of (Edelman, 1994). Cait (2005) echoes the findings that motherless daughters often step into a caregiving role within their family similar to the role the deceased parent held. Transitioning into a caretaker role within one’s family may not be entirely disadvantageous. Research suggests girls who step into this role gain admirable qualities such as empathy and compassion (Edelman, 1994). However, it's important to note that there can also be drawbacks to this role transition, such as developing hyper-independence. Hyper-independence refers to an excessive reliance on oneself and a reluctance to seek help or support from others (Murphy, 2023). In the context of motherless daughters taking on caretaking roles, hyper-independence may develop as a coping mechanism to manage the increased responsibilities and emotional burden following her mother’s death (Murphy, 2023). These daughters may feel pressured to handle everything on their own, fearing that reaching out for assistance could be perceived as a sign of weakness. While the development of empathy and resilience can be seen as admirable, it's crucial to acknowledge the potential negative impact of shouldering too much responsibility at a young age

The author of this paper can deeply relate to the experience of being thrust into a caretaker role following the loss of her mother. She found herself shouldering the responsibility of caring for her younger sister and supporting her grieving father through his own journey of loss and adjustment. At a time when she should have been focused on her own growth and development, the author was forced to mature quickly, assuming the role of both nurturer and emotional support for my family. While this experience undoubtedly shaped the author in

profound ways, instilling in her qualities of empathy and resilience, it also came with its own set of challenges and sacrifices that required strength and perseverance beyond her years. Yet, through it all, she emerged with a heightened sense of compassion and a deeper understanding of the complexities of love and loss.

Attachment and Emotional Bonding

Maternal loss is intricately tied to changes in attachment patterns and emotional bonding (Dyregrov, 2008). Attachment theory, originally developed by John Bowlby (1969), states that early relationships, particularly with primary caregivers, play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's emotional and social development. Within attachment theory, mother's are typically the primary caregiver, providing their children with a sense of emotional and physical security (Bowlby, 1969). When the mother-daughter relationship is torn away from the child, they are left without the secure base of their mother to turn to. The sudden disruption of a bond that is not only emotionally significant but also vital for their sense of safety and trust can lead children to grapple with fears of abandonment and uncertainty about who will provide care and emotional support in their lives. According to attachment theory, our initial experiences in relationships shape our attachments and our expectations for future relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Therefore, when our primary caregiver, who is expected to provide care and security suddenly disappears from our world, it instills the belief that we will face abandonment in subsequent relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Children who once held a secure attachment have been found to shift towards a more insecure attachment with their remaining caregiver and other subsequent relationships following maternal loss (Moss, Cyr, Bureau, Tarabulsy & Dubois-Comtois, 2005).

It is important to note that not all motherless daughters hold a secure attachment with their mother previous to her death. Insecure attachments develop from unstable access to one's

primary caregiver, leading one to feel anxious and insecure in the context of relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Individuals with anxious attachments, characterized by a fear of abandonment and reassurance seeking (Bowlby, 1969), present with overwhelming feelings of anxiety and worry and have great difficulty accepting the loss of their mother (Bowlby, 1980). Conversely, individuals with avoidant attachments, characterized by a desire to maintain autonomy and emotional distance from loved ones (Bowlby, 1969), may create further distance between oneself and the loss of their mother, leading to losing one's access to their thoughts and memories about their mom (Mikulincer et al., 2002).

The loss of a mother can influence how girls' connect with their peer relationships and friendships (Edelman, 1994). Some motherless daughters may become more withdrawn, while others may seek support and companionship from peers (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). For some girls, the loss of their mother can be an overwhelmingly isolating experience. Often peers (most of those who have never experienced loss) have a lack of understanding around the magnitude of maternal loss. Therefore, some motherless daughters may withdraw from their usual social interactions due to feeling misunderstood in their grief, manifesting as increased quietness, reduced engagement in social activities, and a tendency to spend more time alone (Dyregrov, 2008). Motherless daughters may also feel that their experience of early loss has accelerated their maturity, giving them the ability to discriminate between important and unimportant topics at a more advanced level than their peers (Dyregrov, 2008). Therefore, these girls may feel more mature than their friends, in turn withdrawing from these friendships. Conversely, other girls facing maternal loss may actively share their feelings and experiences with friends who can offer empathy and support (Edelman, 1994). These girls may be more vocal about their emotions, using their friendships as a source of comfort and understanding (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). This

approach can be seen as adaptive, as working through one's grief outwardly with trusted others helps them process their experience (Bekkers, 2013). In cases where girls seek support and companionship from their peers, these relationships serve as valuable coping mechanisms as peers can provide emotional comfort, a sense of belonging, and a safe space to express their feelings (Saggers, Campbell & Mann, 2023). This can be crucial in helping girls navigate the challenges of parental loss and maintaining their immediate mental health.

In the realm of attachment and emotional bonding, the continuing bonds theory offers a lens through which to understand the enduring connections between motherless daughters and their deceased mothers. Rooted in the premise that relationships persist beyond physical separation, this theory posits that individuals seek to maintain a sense of ongoing connection and intimacy with their loved ones even after death (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). For motherless daughters, the loss of their mothers does not mark the end of their attachment bond but rather transforms it into a continuing relationship characterized by memories, rituals, and shared experiences (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Despite the absence of physical presence, the emotional bond between mother and daughter persists, providing a source of comfort, guidance, and solace throughout life (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Continuing bonds theory extends beyond individual healing to encompass the broader social landscape of motherless daughters' lives (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Peer relationships and social interactions offer opportunities for motherless daughters to express and integrate their ongoing connection to their mothers within their social networks, further affirming the enduring nature of the bond with their deceased mother.

Age-Based Differentiation

In Edelman's book *Motherless daughters: the legacy of loss* (1994), the author identifies developmental stages of a motherless daughter's life, dividing these stages into early childhood (age six and younger), late childhood (age six to twelve), and adolescence (teen years). For the purpose of this literature review, early childhood and late childhood will be combined as one subcategory, with a focus on children ages six and older.

Younger Children (Age Six to Twelve)

Young children often struggle to process the profound emotions and implications following maternal loss, leading to unique emotional responses (Dyregrov, 2008). It is believed that motherless daughters in this age group experience the most significant challenges coping with the loss as they possess the cognitive and emotional ability to comprehend the loss, but have not fully developed the skills to manage their emotions (Edelman, 1994). They may exhibit confusion and longing for their mother, ask questions about the whereabouts of the deceased mother, or express the belief that their mother will return as a way to navigate their uncertainty and make sense of the absence (Dyregrov, 2008).

As someone who became a motherless daughter at the age of 11, the author of this paper can vividly recall the overwhelming confusion and disorientation that followed in the wake of my mother's passing. The loss shattered her perception of the world as she knew it, leaving her grappling with a profound sense of emptiness and longing. In those initial months, it felt as though her mother's absence was merely temporary, and she would return home at any moment. This heartfelt belief, though illogical in hindsight, served as a coping mechanism to navigate the overwhelming uncertainty and make sense of her absence.

While it can be emotionally challenging for caregivers to repeatedly answer certain inquiries, it's important to recognize that questions about the finality of the loss are a part of the child's coping process and a reflection of their emotional need for reassurance (“When someone dies,” 2023). Children in this age group often fantasize of going back in time to change what has happened as a means of alleviating feelings of helplessness (Dyregrov, 2008). They may also fantasize about their parent’s return (Edelman, 1994). Additionally, many young children respond to grief through play as opposed to vocalizing their grief (Edelman, 1994). This does not mean children who respond this way are expressing denial of the loss, but they are processing the loss by acting out her experience through play (Edelman, 1994). Around the age of seven children gain a greater understanding of death as an unavoidable and universal experience (Dyregrov, 2008). Children at this age need concrete representations of the loss, such as a funeral or tombstone to support their grief processing. (Dyregrov, 2008).

The immediate consequences for younger children who have experienced maternal loss are frequently manifested in regressive behaviours (Edelman, 1994). This includes behaviours such as bedwetting, thumb-sucking, or seeking comfort from a security object such as a stuffed animal (Dyregrov, 2008). These behaviours serve as coping mechanisms for the overwhelming emotions they are experiencing, with the intention of going back to a time in their life when they felt safe and secure (Levins, n.d). Alvis, Zhang, Sandler & Kaplow (2022) add that regressive behaviour following loss is often motivated by a desire to stay connected to the lost loved one by remaining in a similar developmental stage one was while they were still alive. Younger children may struggle in communicating the intense emotions they are experiencing following maternal loss as they lack the capacity to understand and verbalize these emotions adequately (Osterweis et al., 1984). In response to this, young children often revert to regressive behaviours as an

instinctive and non-verbal way to communicate their distress and seek comfort (Edelman, 1994). Regressive behaviour in this context may be seen as the motherless daughter's attempt of receiving nurturance and attention as they process this difficult event (VITAS Healthcare, n.d). Instead of verbalizing her needs to caregivers, it may be easier for her to revert to behaviours in which the motherless daughter knows she will have her emotional needs met, receiving a sense of security she has experienced in the past (Wolfelt, 2004). Therefore, regressive behaviours should not be viewed as a regression in development but rather as a means of coping and self-soothing for younger children. These behaviours offer caregivers insight into the child's emotional needs and serve as avenues for providing the necessary support during this emotionally tumultuous period. If caregivers allow their motherless daughters the freedom to revert to a time where they feel safe, they typically emerge with resilience (Wolfelt, 2004).

Continuing bonds theory provides valuable insight into the emotional responses and coping mechanisms of younger motherless daughters. In this age group, children often exhibit behaviours and engage in activities that reflect their ongoing connection with their deceased mothers. For example, younger children's inquiries about the whereabouts of their deceased mother or their fantasies of her return can be viewed through the lens of continuing bonds theory. These expressions of longing and confusion serve as attempts to maintain a sense of connection with their mothers, highlighting the enduring nature of the mother-child bond (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Additionally, regressive behaviours such as bedwetting or seeking comfort from security objects can be understood as efforts to seek proximity to their mothers and preserve the sense of security they provided (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Within the framework of continuing bonds theory, these behaviours represent the child's ongoing attachment to their mother and their desire to maintain a connection despite her physical absence.

(Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). By acknowledging and validating these behaviours within the context of continuing bonds theory, caregivers can offer meaningful support to younger motherless daughters as they navigate their grief.

Teenagers/ Adolescents (Ages Thirteen to Eighteen)

Adolescents, particularly teenage motherless daughters between the ages of thirteen to eighteen, possess a more advanced understanding of death and its implications compared to younger children (Dyregrov, 2008). At this pivotal stage in life, they have developed the cognitive ability to think hypothetically, enabling them to contemplate a future without their mother (Dyregrov, 2008). Reflecting upon her personal experience as a teenager, the author of this paper found herself grappling with the harsh reality of a future devoid of her mother's presence following her death. With each passing milestone—whether it was her high school graduation or the prospect of her wedding day—the author couldn't shake the haunting realization that her mother would never be there to share in these special moments. The absence of her comforting presence casts a shadow over what should be joyous occasions

Individuals at this age may experience judgement towards themselves in regards to a hypothetical ability to have prevented the situation (Dyregrov, 2008), as well as how the teen interacted with her mother prior to her death (Edelman, 1994). It's normal for a girl to feel both positive and negative emotions toward her mother at this age. Therefore, when an adolescent loses her mother, feelings of guilt and regret may arise around the status of her relationship with her mom before she passed, or for not being a 'good' enough daughter (Edelman, 1994).

Adolescents, given their more advanced cognitive development, often experience complex grief responses in comparison to younger children (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). Adolescents often react with shock and disbelief manifesting as a feeling of numbness (Dyregrov, 2008). During

adolescence, one typically shifts from dependency on caregivers to independence as one grows into a young adult. A motherless daughter in adolescence may struggle to express their feelings of grief due to a fear of looking ‘childish’. Therefore, she may remain stoic as to hold on to what independence she has following maternal loss. Additionally, older children, compared to younger, were found to have an increased risk of depression following maternal loss (Dyregrov, 2008). The risk of depressive symptoms for bereaved adolescents from 12–15 years old have been found to be twice as high than children from 8–11 years old, with girls at twice the risk of boys (Gersten et al., 1991). These findings indicate that adolescence is a particularly vulnerable developmental period to experience maternal loss, and that adolescent motherless daughters may benefit from support systems and interventions that address their unique emotional challenges.

For teenagers, discussions about their emotions and the loss are more common (Dyregrov, 2008). Compared to younger children, teenagers are more likely to engage in open discussions about their emotions and the loss (Lovelace & Smith, 2002). They may express their grief through verbal communication, sharing their thoughts and feelings with peers, family members, or counselors. Teenage girls in particular have a greater ability to verbally express their emotions due to societal gender norms that encourage emotional expression from females (Brody, 2013). Teenage girls often experience challenges in connecting with fathers as their grief follows a different course from their fathers with differences in sensitivity to emotions (Dyregrov, 2008). This reflects the cognitive and emotional development of adolescents, enabling them to navigate complex emotional landscapes more openly than younger children (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2006). Adolescents are better equipped to articulate their thoughts and feelings (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2006), which allows them to engage in meaningful discussions about their emotions following maternal loss. Additionally, adolescents are more prone to engage

in problem-solving discussions (Vandenbroucke et al., 2018), seeking ways to manage their grief and adapt to the new emotional landscape. These discussions often serve as a means of processing their grief and seeking support.

Conversely, some motherless daughters of this age may repress their feelings due to the intensity of emotions, expressing these emotions through behaviour such as risk-seeking behaviour (Edelman, 1994) and conflicts with family members (Dyregrov, 2008). Substance use was found to be around 2.4 times higher in youth who had experienced loss compared to those who had not (Hamdan et al., 2013). Female adolescents in particular typically report more challenges around distressing emotions than negative behaviours (Rotheram-Borus, 2001). It is important to be mindful of the variability motherless daughters present in terms of expressing their emotions, tailoring how we support their needs accordingly.

Societal expectations and gender norms play a crucial role in shaping how teenage girls respond to maternal loss (Edelman, 1994). Young women often face unique pressures to conform to traditional feminine behaviour, which may discourage the open expression of anger or depression (Brody, 2013). Even though teenagers are more likely to discuss their experience of grief and loss with friends than any other source of support (Edelman, 1994), often the discussion of maternal loss causes discomfort and resistance for those involved. Edelman, (1994) shares that a motherless daughter's peers have difficulties providing emotional support, often unable to validate and understand the magnitude of her loss due to denial about the implications for the mortality of their loved ones. Peers often do not know how to deal with conversations surrounding death, so they may avoid contact altogether (Dyregrov, 2008). Additionally, adolescent girls live in a social landscape with rules on how to conform in order to 'fit in' with others, such as being in touch with our emotions, but not expressing our emotions as 'dramatic'

or 'out of control'. Bereaving daughters feel anger, denial, and depression (Dyregrov, 2008), often seen as 'negative' emotions in women when expressed outwardly (Diehl, 2023). Young women who exhibit rage are not keeping with traditional feminine behaviours (van Breen & Barreto, 2023). An adolescent who has lost her mother, like any adolescent girl, wants other females to like her, therefore the girl who thinks her mother's death will make her appear different or abnormal will often avoid talking about the loss or revealing any 'negative' emotions to her friends (Lovelace, & Smith, 2002). Many adolescents fear the consequences they may feel if they lose control of their emotions (Dyregrov, 2008). Due to this fear, many older children express emotions such as crying less freely than both younger children and adults (Edelman, 1994) With this social landscape in mind, providing these girls with a source of guidance and normality in their experience and emotions could prove helpful in a context of minimal support. According to continuing bonds theory, even in the absence of their mothers, adolescents maintain emotional connections through various means, such as reminiscing about shared memories or internalizing maternal values (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014).

Drawing upon continuing bonds theory, it becomes apparent that teenagers' ability to think hypothetically about a future without their mothers is intertwined with their ongoing emotional bonds. When teenagers contemplate a future without their mothers, they do so within the framework of their ongoing emotional bonds. The ability to think hypothetically about a future without their mothers is intertwined with their efforts to preserve and honor the relationship they shared (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Additionally, continuing bonds theory emphasizes the importance of open communication and support networks in adolescent grief processes (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). Teenagers may seek opportunities to discuss their emotions and memories with peers, family members, or counselors, facilitating the

expression of grief and the validation of their experiences. By fostering environments that encourage such dialogue, caregivers and support systems can empower adolescents to navigate their grief journey with resilience and authenticity.

Summary

The loss of one's mother casts a profound shadow on the emotional landscapes of children and teenagers, particularly girls. This literature review has explored the immediate mental health consequences that girls grapple with following maternal loss, delving into emotional responses, psychological adjustments, and changes in attachment patterns. The thematic analysis highlighted the pervasive impact of anger, denial, and depression as emotional responses, uncovering how these emotions serve as both protests against the painful loss and as reality-testing experiments. Psychological adjustments, including redefining self-identity, were identified as a significant aspect of a motherless daughter's journey, with an exploration of the ways girls navigate their evolving identities. The examination of attachment and emotional bonding revealed the relationship between the loss of one's mother, changes in attachment patterns, and the subsequent influence on peer relationships. The age-based differentiation shed light on the unique emotional challenges faced by younger children and adolescents that shape their grieving process. As we navigate the intricate web of emotions and behaviours that girls confront following maternal loss, it becomes evident that acknowledging and addressing age-specific manifestations of grief is crucial for tailoring effective support and interventions. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by younger children, who often resort to regressive behaviours as coping mechanisms, and adolescents, who grapple with complex emotions while conforming to societal expectations, we can develop targeted interventions.

In fostering a holistic approach that considers the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of a motherless daughter's experience, chapter 3 aims to identify supports and interventions specifically tailored to the needs of the motherless daughter through their formative years. Implementing targeted interventions that provide empathetic support for motherless daughters will aid in fostering a compassionate environment crucial for their healing and growth.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Recommendations and Application

Discussion

In Canada there is a lack of tailored support for the unique challenges motherless daughters face, more specifically there is little to no support catering to the specific needs of older adolescents coping with maternal loss. Resources such as the Canadian Mental Health Association provide support for grief as a generalized topic, but fail to go further in supporting the unique challenges motherless daughters face. Support resources targeted to motherless daughters currently primarily focus on connecting motherless daughters of varying ages through technology, such as “The Motherlove Project,” a blog and Instagram account created by a woman in Ontario named Janet Gwilliam-Wright in 2020 to honour the 25th anniversary of her mother’s death, developing into a space where nearly 300 women from around the world share stories about their late mothers (Motherlove Project, n.d.). Recognizing the diverse experiences and needs of motherless daughters is paramount in providing effective support. Children and adolescents navigate their grief and loss differently based on their age, cognitive development, and emotional maturity (Dyregrov, 2008). Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to support may overlook significant differences and fail to address the specific challenges faced by motherless daughters at different stages of their development.

For younger motherless daughters, aged 6-12, the loss of a mother figure can be particularly destabilizing. This age group is in a crucial phase of their lives, where the absence of maternal guidance may lead to feelings of confusion, insecurity, and a sense of disconnection (Dyregrov, 2008). They may struggle to comprehend the permanence of death and grapple with intense emotions without the cognitive capacity to fully process them (Edelman, 1994). In contrast, adolescent motherless daughters, aged 13-18, face a unique set of challenges as they

navigate the complex terrain of adolescence. This period is marked by heightened self-awareness, peer influence, and the exploration of independence (Edelman, 1994). For these daughters, the absence of a mother can magnify feelings of loneliness, isolation, and identity crisis (Edelman, 1994). They may yearn for maternal guidance during pivotal life events such as prom, graduation, or navigating romantic relationships, further exacerbating their sense of loss. Whether it be the initial stages of schooling, the tumultuous years of adolescence, or the transition to adulthood, each phase presents unique challenges for motherless daughters to navigate. Understanding the coping mechanisms employed by daughters at different ages is crucial. While younger children may exhibit behaviors such as regression (Dyregrov, 2008), adolescents often grapple with identity formation in the absence of maternal guidance (Edelman, 1994).

Acknowledging the distinct needs of motherless daughters across different age groups is essential in designing effective support programs. Tailored interventions would provide age-appropriate resources and coping strategies that resonate with the developmental stage and unique experiences of each motherless daughter. Additionally, by incorporating continuing bonds theory into therapeutic interventions for motherless daughters, therapists can help validate motherless daughters' ongoing bond with their mothers, offering them a space to explore and cherish memories of their mother's legacy. Chapter 3 aims to outline the implementation of a therapeutic group specifically designed for adolescent motherless daughters. Drawing from established therapeutic approaches, and research findings from Chapter 2, the author will discuss the rationale, design, and implementation of this group. By providing a structured and supportive environment, the aim is to help adolescent motherless daughters explore their grief, develop coping skills, and create meaningful connections with peers facing similar challenges.

By addressing the specific needs of adolescent motherless daughters, we can foster resilience, promote healing, and empower these girls to navigate their grief journey with greater understanding and support.

Clinical Implications

Implementing a specialized therapeutic group for motherless daughters tailored to adolescents presents a valuable opportunity to provide peer support tailored to their unique developmental needs and grief experiences. Drawing from Irvin D. Yalom's extensive research and clinical practice in group therapy, therapeutic support for motherless daughters within a group setting would utilize factors such as universality, altruism, and interpersonal learning that is unique to this setting (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Yalom emphasizes the importance of universality within group settings, helping participants recognize their shared experiences (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Peer support within these therapeutic groups offers motherless daughters the chance to connect with others who share similar experiences, providing a sense of belonging, understanding, and validation. Altruism is another key aspect of Yalom's framework, allowing participants a space to help and support each other through their experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Working within a group setting with motherless daughters provides a space to utilize the power of peer support to facilitate healing and resilience among motherless daughters. Lastly, Yalom emphasizes the importance of interpersonal learning within group settings (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). By focusing on age-specific therapeutic interventions within the group, therapists working with motherless daughters can create a space where collective experiences and perspectives of participants can address common challenges and promote growth. Group settings create opportunities for participants to learn from each other's coping strategies, normalize their experiences, and develop a sense of community. Additionally, research has

consistently demonstrated the importance of peer support in mitigating feelings of isolation and fostering emotional well-being, particularly among individuals navigating grief and loss (Cacciatore, Thieleman, Fretts, & Jackson, 2021).

The choice to utilize a group model is motivated by its distinct advantages over traditional one-on-one counseling approaches in this context. Group therapy offers an interactive environment where participants can benefit from the collective support of their peers (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Unlike individual therapy, where the focus is primarily on the client and therapist dyad, group settings create a unique space for shared experiences and perspectives. Motherless daughters engaging in group therapy have the opportunity to connect with others who understand their journey, fostering a sense of genuine understanding that may be difficult to replicate in individual therapy. Additionally, group therapy provides a space for motherless daughters to normalize their experiences, and develop a sense of belonging (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). By witnessing the resilience and growth of their peers, motherless daughters can draw inspiration for their own healing journey. In contrast, one-on-one counseling may lack the communal support and shared understanding that group therapy offers. While individual therapy allows for focused attention on the client's unique needs and challenges, it may inadvertently reinforce feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly for motherless daughters who crave a connection with others who share similar experiences.

In light of Dr. Mary Hedtke's insightful critique of conventional grief counselling, which emphasizes detachment from our lost loved one as a prerequisite for "moving on," (Hedtke, 2012) it is essential to reconsider the assumptions underlying bereavement support. Dr. Hedtke, a renowned psychologist specializing in grief and loss, has developed an alternative view of grief and loss that prioritizes the enduring bond that individuals maintain with their loved ones

(Hedtke, 2012). Hedtke challenges the notion that detachment from our lost loved one is necessary to 'heal' from our grief (Hedtke, 2012). Instead, she proposes an alternative approach which prioritizes the continuation of relationships without demanding detachment (Hedtke, 2012). This perspective aligns closely with the continuing bonds theory, which suggests that individuals can maintain a sense of connection with their deceased loved ones through memories, rituals, and ongoing relationships (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). In the context of supporting motherless daughters, integrating the principles of continuing bonds theory becomes particularly relevant. While traditional grief support may emphasize moving away from the deceased, the concept of continuing bonds recognizes the importance of maintaining a relationship with the deceased as a source of comfort and support in the grieving process (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 2014). By incorporating continuing bonds theory into therapeutic interventions for motherless daughters, therapists can help validate motherless daughters' ongoing bond with their mothers, offering them a space to explore and cherish memories of their mother's legacy.

Recommendations

Inspired by both Yalom and Hedtke's work, the author has created a therapeutic group program that works with both adolescents (ages 13-18) to address and provide support for the unique challenges these motherless daughters face through this life stage. This group will be called Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters. The name "Mom's Legacy" reflects the central focus of the program, which is to honor and celebrate the enduring impact of mothers on their daughters' lives, even in their absence. Additionally, "Supporting Sisters" emphasizes the sense of solidarity fostered within the group, where participants come together as sisters bound by shared experiences of maternal loss. Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters has been designed as a

six-week therapeutic group, inspired by Hedtke's alternative approach to grief counselling, which emphasizes the continuation of relationships without demanding detachment (Hedtke, 2012).

Mom's Legacy aims to honor and celebrate the enduring impact of mothers on their daughters' lives, even in their absence.

Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's is structured to accommodate adolescents aged 13-18, recognizing the unique developmental stage and coping mechanisms of this cohort. Drawing from Dr. Mary Hedtke's approach, the program prioritizes creating a space where voices can be heard and experiences shared (Hedtke, 2012). Through peer support discussions, participants will have the opportunity to explore complex emotions and identity formation in relation to their maternal loss. The program encourages flexibility and ownership of the group sessions, empowering participants to personalize their healing journey within a supportive community of peers (Hedtke, 2012). Facilitators will be encouraged to begin each session by inviting participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and topics they would like to explore during the session. Throughout the session, facilitators would incorporate these suggestions and preferences into the program, allowing participants to take ownership of their healing. By focusing on one group for adolescents, Mom's Legacy aims to provide targeted and tailored support that addresses the specific needs and challenges faced by this age group in coping with maternal loss.

Rationale

The rationale behind the development of the Mom's Legacy program stems from acknowledging that maternal loss often has a profound and lasting impact on a child's development, shaping their emotional well-being, identity formation, and interpersonal relationships (Edelman, 1994). Mom's Legacy aims to fill a crucial gap in existing therapeutic services by offering age-specific programs tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents

coping with maternal loss. Grief and coping mechanisms vary significantly across different developmental stages (Dyregrov, 2008). Adolescents aged 13-18 typically grapple with complex emotions, identity formation, and future aspirations in the context of maternal loss, necessitating peer support discussions and narrative exploration to navigate their grief journey. Therefore, specialized programs tailored to this unique age group is necessary in providing effective support. Early intervention strategies such as Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters will play a vital role in mitigating the long-term psychological impact of maternal loss on children, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Research has consistently demonstrated that children who experience maternal loss are at increased risk of developing a range of emotional and behavioral difficulties, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and interpersonal challenges (Edelman, 1994). By identifying and addressing grief reactions and coping mechanisms early in the grieving process, Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters aims to equip children and adolescents with the necessary tools and resources to navigate their grief journey, helping prevent the exacerbation of future mental health issues. Motherless daughters participating in this program will be provided psychoeducation and skill-building activities aimed at enhancing their emotional regulation, coping skills, and resilience. Facilitators will provide information on grief and loss, including the normalization of grief, as well as offer tools and resources for managing emotions and stress, such as mindfulness meditation, with the aim for these motherless daughters to develop their own personalized coping strategies and self-care practices.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of continuing bonds theory in grief counselling, there remains a notable gap in its application within therapeutic programs tailored specifically for motherless daughters. As a result, motherless daughters may encounter limited opportunities to explore their continuing bonds with their late mothers within therapeutic

settings. The Mom's Legacy program, inspired by the principles of continuing bonds theory, seeks to provide a supportive environment where motherless daughters can embrace and celebrate their ongoing relationship with their mothers in a world that often encourages detachment from the deceased.

Programs like Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters recognize the importance of creating a supportive community environment where motherless daughters can connect with peers who share similar experiences. By fostering a sense of belonging, this program aims to provide emotional support and validation therefore reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness often experienced by motherless daughters. Additionally, by addressing grief and loss in a supportive group setting, early intervention programs like Mom's Legacy help normalize the grieving process and reduce stigma surrounding maternal loss. By encouraging open dialogue and expression of emotions, Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters creates a safe space where motherless daughters feel heard, understood, and accepted.

Objectives

The Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters therapeutic group program aims to create a nurturing environment where motherless daughters aged 13-18 can find support in their journey of grief and loss. This program offers an alternative approach to grief support, diverging from conventional models that emphasize detachment and "moving on" from loss, as outlined by Hedtke's critique of contemporary grief counselling (Hedtke, 2012). Rather than prioritizing detachment, the program focuses on acknowledging and honoring the enduring impact of mothers on their daughters' lives, even in their absence. This approach challenges the assumption that detaching from the deceased is necessary for successful grieving, instead emphasizing the importance of preserving the bond and memory of the lost loved one (Hedtke, 2012). Mom's

Legacy: Supporting Sisters aims to honor the maternal legacy by celebrating and preserving the memories, values, and influence of participants' mothers. Through storytelling, and commemorative activities, participants will pay tribute to their mothers' legacy, fostering a sense of connection with their mother beyond their physical absence. By honoring their mothers' memory, participants will find strength in embracing their own identities while cherishing the legacy of maternal love that continues to shape their lives.

Central to the program's objectives is emotional support and ensuring that participants feel heard, understood, and validated as they navigate the complexities of mourning their mothers' absence. Through facilitated discussions, activities, and peer interactions, participants will be encouraged to explore and express their emotions freely, fostering a sense of safety and belonging within the group. In addition to emotional support, the program focuses on facilitating grief processing in a manner tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents. Additionally, Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters aims to equip participants with practical tools and strategies to manage the challenges associated with grief and loss. Participants will learn coping skills that enable them to regulate their emotions and navigate difficult situations with resilience.

Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's emphasizes the importance of peer connection and mutual support, fostering a sense of solidarity among participants. By sharing experiences, offering empathy, and providing validation, the goal is that participants will form meaningful connections with their peers, alleviating feelings of isolation and creating a sense of community within the group. As participants explore their grief journey, the program also focuses on enhancing self-understanding and identity formation, empowering participants to navigate their grief within the context of their evolving sense of self following maternal loss. Through reflective exercises, storytelling, and narrative exploration, participants will gain insight into

their personal narratives, strengths, and values, fostering a positive sense of identity and self-worth despite the absence of their mothers.

Practical Considerations

As motherless daughters and their families often have limited resources following maternal loss, practical considerations are crucial when working with this population. Accessibility is a major factor in ensuring this program reaches those who need it. Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's will connect with local counselling centers, schools, and community organizations serving families affected by maternal loss, establishing ongoing communication to ensure that girls in need of support are aware of this resource. Referrals will be established through these channels, allowing individuals to access the program through self-referral or referral by mental health professionals, school counselors, or community workers. The program will be facilitated by licensed mental health professionals with expertise in grief counselling and group therapy, who will undergo specialized training in the program's approach and objectives. Facilitators will provide leadership, guidance, and emotional support to participants throughout the group sessions, ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for healing and growth.

Screening participants for Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sistes is crucial in ensuring the qualities of universality, altruism and interpersonal learning outlined by Yalom & Leszcz (2020) are present throughout group therapy. Acceptance into Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters will be based on criteria designed to ensure a cohesive group dynamic. First, participants must fall within the age range of 13-18 years to ensure that the group's discussions are developmentally appropriate for all participants. Second, participants must have experienced the loss of their mother, stepmother, or primary maternal caregiver to ensure a shared experience of maternal loss within the group. Lastly, participants should possess and stability in their living situation and

mental health status, with no acute mental health crises or significant interpersonal conflicts that may disrupt the group dynamic or compromise their ability to engage in the program. For example, a participant who is experiencing an unstable housing situation may not have the stability necessary to fully engage in the program. Similarly, a participant who is currently struggling with severe depression or suicidality may find it challenging to participate effectively in group discussions and activities. Participants will be initially screened through an intake questionnaire to assess their readiness and suitability for group participation. Individuals who pass the initial screening are invited to an in-depth interview with a mental health professional trained in grief counseling. During this interview, the facilitator explores the circumstances of their maternal loss, current coping strategies, and emotional state. The interview serves as an opportunity for the facilitator to assess the participant's eligibility based on the program's criteria, as well as to clarify any questions participants have about the program, ensuring that participants have a clear understanding of what to expect from the Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters.

Group sessions will be limited to a manageable size to facilitate meaningful engagement among participants while allowing for personalized attention from facilitators. Each group will consist of approximately 6 to 8 participants, with two separate groups for children aged 6-12 and adolescents aged 12-18 to ensure age-appropriate support and interventions. The program will strive to minimize barriers to participation by offering flexible scheduling options, including weekday evenings and weekends, to accommodate participants' busy schedules. Additionally, the program will provide financial assistance for families facing financial hardship, ensuring that cost does not serve as a barrier to accessing much-needed support.

Recognizing the potential for participants to desire ongoing support beyond the initial six-week program, the facilitators will explore the option of allowing participants to repeat the

group. This would provide an opportunity for participants who have completed the initial six-week program to continue their healing journey in a supportive environment, as well as provide mentorship to newcomers. By allowing participants to repeat the program, Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's aims to create a continuum of care that addresses the evolving needs of motherless daughters as they progress in their grief journey. Graduates of the initial program may find value in revisiting topics discussed in the first six weeks, exploring new aspects of their grief, and building upon the connections formed with their peers. Additionally, participants who choose to repeat the program can serve as valuable sources of support and encouragement for newcomers, enhancing the therapeutic effectiveness of the program for all participants. Facilitators will work closely with participants to gauge interest and assess the feasibility of participants repeating the program. By remaining responsive to the needs and preferences of participants, the program aims to provide tailored support that fosters healing, resilience, and community among motherless daughters

Topics

Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters will be based on Hedtke's (2012) six-part approach for grief related group counselling. The group will consist of six weeks, with each week focusing on a different topic related to the participant's experience of maternal loss. The topics and group structure for Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters are as follows: (1) Introduction and Welcome; (2) Understanding my Grief (3) Exploring my New Identity; (4) Importance of Peer Support; (5) Healing Through Connection; (5) Celebration and Reflection. Each week within this program will consist of new discussions and activities surrounding the topic of the week (see Appendix B).

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

The Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters program adheres closely to the ethical guidelines set forth by the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC), ensuring that all aspects of the program prioritize the well-being and ethical treatment of participants. While following the guidelines set forth by the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC), the program acknowledges the unique context of working with young individuals. Understanding the developmental stage of participants, the program places a strong emphasis on ensuring that adolescents are empowered to make informed decisions about their involvement. In addition to obtaining consent from both participants and their legal guardians, facilitators are trained to communicate with youth in an age-appropriate and empathetic manner, fostering an environment of trust and respect. Participants are provided with comprehensive information about the program, including its purpose, goals, and potential risks and benefits, allowing them to make informed decisions about their involvement. Confidentiality is maintained throughout the program, with guidelines in place to protect the privacy of participants' personal information, consistent with the BCACC's commitment to confidentiality and privacy (BCACC, 2023). Professional boundaries will be maintained at all times, with facilitators refraining from engaging in dual relationships that may compromise the therapeutic process. Any conflicts of interest are addressed transparently and ethically, with the best interests of the participants as the primary consideration, aligning with the BCACC's emphasis on professional integrity and accountability (BCACC, 2023) .

Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are fundamental aspects of the program, acknowledging the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of participants and that grief and loss are deeply influenced by cultural beliefs and traditions. Facilitators will receive training on

cultural competency to ensure that all participants feel respected and valued, regardless of their cultural identity. Facilitators will also encourage participants to share their cultural beliefs surrounding death and mourning, fostering mutual understanding and empathy among group members. Additionally, cultural sensitivity extends to the language used within this group, therefore the language used in relation to grief and loss must be culturally appropriate and respectful. Facilitators will remain mindful of potential cultural sensitivities surrounding grief and loss, adapting their language accordingly.

Conclusions

The Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sisters program represents a step forward in addressing the unique needs of adolescent motherless daughters. By providing age-specific therapeutic interventions and peer support, this program offers a supportive space for motherless daughters to navigate their grief journey with resilience and strength. Through activities such as art therapy and peer discussions, participants are empowered to express their emotions, share their stories, and foster connections with peers who understand their experiences.

Despite the significant progress made in addressing the needs of motherless daughters, there remain gaps in this field. One gap lies in the limited availability of support programs tailored to different age groups. Many existing interventions that focus on motherless daughters neglect the unique developmental needs and coping mechanisms of each cohort. The Mom's Legacy program bridges this gap by offering age-specific therapeutic groups that cater to the distinct needs of adolescents aged 13-18. Another gap in the field relates to the lack of cultural sensitivity in existing support programs for motherless daughters. Grief and loss are deeply influenced by cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions, yet many interventions overlook the importance of cultural competence. The Mom's Legacy program addresses this gap by

prioritizing cultural sensitivity, ensuring that facilitators are trained in cultural competency and discussions are designed to accommodate diverse cultural perspectives on grief and loss.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue expanding and refining support programs for motherless daughters to better meet their unique needs. This includes conducting further research to understand the long-term impact of maternal loss on daughters' mental health and well-being and developing interventions that integrate evidence-based practices with cultural sensitivity. By filling these gaps we can ensure that motherless daughters receive the comprehensive support they need to thrive within the context of maternal loss.

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Appendix A

Mom's Legacy: Supporting Sister's (Ages 13 - 18) - Treatment Plan

Week 1 - Introduction & Welcome:

- Adolescents will participate in small group discussions, sharing their experiences of losing their mothers and how it has impacted their lives.
- They will create a group mural or collage representing their collective experiences and emotions.
- Facilitators will introduce group guidelines and the concept of peer support, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and respect within the group.

Week 2 - Understanding my Grief:

- Participants will explore different aspects of grief, including the physical, emotional, and social dimensions.
- They will watch videos or read excerpts from Hedtke's work, discussing how societal expectations influence the grieving process.
- Facilitators will guide discussions on coping mechanisms and healthy ways of expressing grief.

Week 3 - Exploring my New Identity:

- Participants will engage in a journaling exercise where they reflect on their sense of identity and self-esteem in relation to their mothers' absence.
- They will explore questions such as "Who am I without my mother?" and "How has her absence shaped my identity?"
- Following this journaling exercise, facilitators will encourage open dialogue and self-reflection, validating participants' feelings and experiences.

Week 4 - Importance of Peer Support:

- Participants will form smaller groups of 2-3 individuals each, allowing for more intimate discussions and deeper connections.
 - Within these smaller groups, adolescents will have the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, and successes related to maternal loss in a more focused and supportive setting.
- Facilitators will provide prompts or discussion topics to guide conversations, encouraging participants to actively listen and empathize with each other's experiences.
- After the breakout sessions, the larger group will reconvene for a reflective discussion where participants can share insights and reflections from their smaller group discussions

Week 5 - Healing Through Connection:

- Participants will engage in a series of trust-building exercises and team-building activities designed to foster a sense of camaraderie and support within the group.
 - These activities include partner trust falls and group problem-solving tasks.

- Through these activities, participants will learn to rely on each other for support, recognize the value of mutual trust and empathy, and strengthen their connections with their peers.
- Facilitators will guide discussions on the importance of connection in the healing process and how supportive relationships can aid in coping with grief and loss.

Week 6 - Celebration and Reflection:

- The final session will focus on celebrating the progress made and reflecting on their experiences in the group.
- Adolescents will share their favorite memories and takeaways from the program.
- They will create a group collage or memory book commemorating their time together, reinforcing the bonds formed and the support received.