



Perceived Communications Positively Impact Grief and Grieving

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Opinion

This paper explores the prevalence and effects of after-death communications (ADCs) in individuals grieving the loss of a partner or spouse, particularly in the context of the recent global upsurge in deaths due to pandemic, warfare, environmental disasters, and climate events. ADCs are experiences in which individuals claim to have had direct contact with or received signs or messages from a person who has died. These communications can take various forms, such as feeling the deceased's presence, hearing their voice, sensing a touch, smelling a familiar scent, or even having visions of the deceased. ADCs are considered personal and subjective experiences, and they often provide comfort and a sense of continued connection to the deceased for those who experience them. While ADCs have been reported throughout history and across various cultures, the interpretation and acceptance of such experiences differ widely. Some people view ADCs as spiritual or religious affirmations, while others seek explanations in psychological or neurological terms, suggesting that they might represent natural coping mechanisms during grief. These experiences are commonly reported after the loss of a close friend or family member and can occur spontaneously, without any apparent external stimuli. Researchers and clinicians are interested in ADCs for their potential therapeutic value in the grieving process, though the phenomenon is not yet fully understood from a scientific perspective.

Recent global events have led to unprecedented increases in mortality rates, prompting a subsequent rise in the number of individuals experiencing grief. Despite the commonality of grief, advancements in therapeutic approaches for managing fear of

death and the grieving process have been markedly slow. The phenomenon of after-death communication (ADC) presents a unique area of interest within this domain, with reports suggesting that a significant proportion of the global population will experience at least one ADC in their lifetime. Given that a recent Pew Research indicated that a majority of Americans reported ADC experiences, there is a critical need to understand the prevalence and impact of ADCs, especially on individuals who have lost partners or spouses [1]. Remarkably, 53% of Americans reported experiencing an ADC, with a notable 44% reporting such encounters in the past year alone [1].

While the experience of ADCs has been widely reported throughout history across various societies, the impact on those who have lost intimate partners remains under-researched. Through data collected from 70 individuals, Penberthy (2023) [2] investigated how ADCs contribute to the grieving process, emotional healing, and acceptance of loss, as well as the degree to which such experiences affect grief-associated sadness and recovery from loss. Penberthy gathered qualitative data from 70 participants who reported experiencing ADCs from deceased partners or spouses [2]. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, was utilized to collect data on the presence of ADCs, their frequency, nature, and perceived impact on the grieving process, emotional healing, and acceptance of loss. The majority of participants recognized ADCs as a pivotal aspect of their grieving and healing processes. Data indicated that ADCs generally did not exacerbate the pain associated with loss, with 41% reporting no change in grief-related sadness and 40% noting a reduction. Furthermore,

nearly 50% of participants felt that ADCs played a critical role in facilitating the acceptance of their loss.

The findings suggest that ADCs could have a potentially therapeutic role in the context of bereavement, particularly in the aftermath of losing a spouse or partner. The variation in responses regarding grief-associated sadness indicates that individual differences play a significant role in the impact of ADCs. The results underscore the necessity for a deeper comprehension of ADCs within the grieving process and support the exploration of this phenomenon for therapeutic means. ADCs represent a significant element of the grieving process for many individuals coping with the loss of a spouse or partner. The findings of this study highlight

the therapeutic potential of ADCs and the importance of further scholarly investigation into their role in bereavement across different cultures. It is imperative for the development of effective grief therapies that these experiences are understood within the broader context of individual bereavement journeys.

References

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2. Penberthy JK, Pehlivanova M, Kalelioglu T, Roe CA, Cooper CE, et al. (2023) Factors moderating the impact of after death communications on beliefs and spirituality. OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying 87(3): 884-901.