GRIEF SYMPTOMS IN WIDOWED AND DIVORCED OLDER ADULTS

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RESULTS

Levels of grief in the observed variables: Widowed participants reported higher levels of grief in the overall scale ($M=1.98$, $SE=.04$ vs. $M=1.69$, $SE=.04$, $t=-5.77$, $p<.0001$).

Differences: Widowed participant reported significantly and substantially ($d=0.2$) higher levels of Longing and yearning, Emotional pain, Feeling stunned, Trouble accepting the loss but lower levels of Avoidance of reminders of loss, Difficulties to trust others.

IRT Analyses: Do some grief symptoms behave differently for widowed and divorced participants with the same level on the underlying dimension? Being widowed was related to higher levels of grief ($\beta=21$, $p<.000$). However, modification indices based on a MIMIC model suggested that longing, emotional pain, difficulties with trusting others and avoidance were affected by differential item functioning. Furthermore, some symptoms were associated with a different standing on the latent grief dimension (see below). When accounting for differential item functioning by adding direct effects of these symptoms on the grief factor, the association between being widowed and levels of grief decreased ($\beta=0.8$, $p=.035$).

DISCUSSION

• The same symptoms of grief were related of a different level severity in divorced and widowed participants, suggesting a different «meaning» of the symptoms. Thus, items and overall scores of the Prolonged Grief Questionnaire should not be compared without adjusting for differential item functioning.
• Implications for interventions: For widowed participants, bitterness over the loss, trying to avoid reminders of loss, and difficulties trusting others may indicate a need for intervention, while difficulties with trust are rather common and less severe after divorce. In divorced participants, feeling stunned, and feeling that life was empty or meaningless, longing and yearning for the ex-partner and emotional pain were indicative of high levels of grief, while the latter two were less severe in widowed participants.