



D31 Stressors, Needs, and Management of Death Notification for the Working Professional

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The goal of this presentation is to inform attendees of the need for formal death notification training, primarily from the perspective of stress management and awareness for the notifier.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by making professionals aware of the effect that death notifications have on the notifier and the suggested solutions for this traumatic task.

The emotionally difficult task of informing a survivor that their loved one has died is an assignment that is necessary, yet traumatic, for everyone involved. While this understudied area is reviewed largely from the perspective of how to assist the loved one's next-of-kin, studies have not fully addressed how the notification affects the individual delivering the bad news. Forensic professionals, including death investigators, crime scene personnel, and even laboratory analysts, may face this situation in their professional roles.

What must be considered is that any forensic professional who is exposed to a case involving death is potentially exposed to the trauma of death notification. Whether they make the notification personally, or are present at a scene where a notification occurs, forensic professionals need to be prepared to deal with survivors of the deceased. While some professionals may take the attitude that notification is just part of the job and that they don't need any assistance, studies in this presentation show effective notification delivery skills and stress management tools for notifiers to follow.

The leader in death notification study and training is the group Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD). The research, protocol and training that MADD performs have opened a door toward conducting effective death notifications as well as strategies to reduce stress and trauma for the notifier. In this presentation MADD's suggestions and protocol are combined with research results of Lord, Stewart, and Mercer whose extensive survey of 245 professionals provides information relative to notifier stressors including causes of death, survivor reactions, and methods used to cope with the difficulties associated with notifications.

The Lord, Stewart, and Mercer study also showed that 70% of participants had performed at least one death notification; however, nearly 40% of these participants had never received formal training in death notification. The call for training in delivering effective notifications as well as the need for professionals to implement stress management tools is a need that should be continually addressed. Ultimately, the goal is the well-being of the survivors and the ability for forensic professionals to continue in their respective professions with good mental health and effective work relationships.

Death Notification, Stress Management, Communication