

# Briefing on the impact of cost-of-living on people experiencing bereavement

October 2023

Bereavement is one of the most difficult experiences that we will face in our lives, it can affect us in many ways, including placing a strain on our finances.<sup>1</sup> These issues can be compounded by a lack of adequate support.<sup>2</sup> This is something that affects so many of us, over 650,000 people died in the UK in 2022<sup>3</sup> and it is estimated that for every death, nine people are affected by bereavement.

The cost-of-living crisis has hit UK households hard, and we know that it will have worsened the financial difficulties faced by many bereaved people. Sue Ryder commissioned polling of people who have been bereaved in the last two years to gain a better understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on finances following a bereavement. Between May and June 2023 Censuswide surveyed 2,015 18+ respondents who have experienced a bereavement in the last 2 years.

**Findings show that many people are significantly financially impacted by bereavement and this has been further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. It also reveals gaps in the support and advice that people receive.**

## Key Findings

### Financial impact of bereavement and the cost-of-living crisis

Over a third of respondents found that their bereavement negatively affected their finances and made it harder to cope with rising costs in living. This led to worsening emotional wellbeing and meant many had to borrow money to cover the cost of essentials. With so much to contend with when grieving, it is unacceptable that people are also faced with financial worries.

- 34% reported that their financial situation worsened as a result of their bereavement. This rises to 47% of those aged 18-24 and to 79% of those whose spouse/ partner died.
- 35% said their bereavement has made it harder to cope financially with the cost-of-living crisis.
- This figure rises to 50% for those aged 18-24 (the age group most likely to be affected) and 56% for those whose spouse/partner died (the group most likely to be affected when looking at the relationship to the person who died).

### Impact on wellbeing

- 44% reported that financial pressures due to their bereavement were having a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. This rises to 72% of respondents whose spouse/partner had died.

### Borrowing money

- In the last two years, 43% have borrowed money to cover essentials because of their bereavement, with 21% saying they had borrowed money on more than one occasion.
- This rises to 65% of those aged 18-24 and 77% for those whose child had died.

### Source of borrowed money

- 60% borrowed money from family.
- 36% borrowed money from friends.
- 27% borrowed money via payday loans or loan shark.
- 21% borrowed money from banks.

<sup>1</sup> [https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc\\_summary\\_report\\_low-res.pdf](https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc_summary_report_low-res.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sueryder.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A%20better%20route%20through%20grief%20report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-64209221>



## Support and advice

Too many are not getting the support and advice they need to cope with the financial impact of their bereavement. These findings add weight to wider evidence that shows people struggle to sort out financial and practical affairs following a bereavement,<sup>4</sup> do not get the financial support and advice they would like<sup>5</sup> and do not get adequate support from their employer.<sup>6</sup>

### Employer support

- 22% did not receive but would have wanted paid bereavement leave of up to two weeks. 24% did not receive but would have wanted paid bereavement leave of more than two weeks.
- 20% did not receive but would have wanted financial support in addition to a regular salary (e.g. a loan or salary advance).

### Accessing advice

- 24% accessed advice to help them understand their finances/make financial decisions in the six months after the bereavement. 57% of these respondents said this support had a positive impact.
- 68% did not access this advice in the six months following the bereavement. Of these respondents the most common reasons for not accessing advice given were; I did not want or need it (39%), I did not know it was available (28%), and I did not know where to access it (17%).
- 43% thought they would benefit from financial advice to help them understand their finances/make financial decisions.

## Next steps for Government

These figures show that too many people face financial strain while they are grieving and are not getting the support they need. This is unacceptable. **To address these urgent issues the Government should implement a cross-government bereavement plan, covering all areas of public policy which affect bereaved people, including bereavement support. This should include:**

- Developing a bereavement specific pathway that adopts a public health approach. The pathway should be informed by evidence of effective clinical and non-clinical interventions and should establish formal referral partnerships and feedback loops. This must include guidance on signposting to financial advice and support.
- Undertaking further research into the financial impact of bereavement and review how people are financially supported after bereavement as well as the barriers to accessing this support. There is currently a lack of high-quality research in these areas.
- Introduce statutory bereavement leave of two weeks for all employees who have experienced a close bereavement.

## About Sue Ryder

At Sue Ryder, we can't make life's most difficult moments easy, but we can carry some of the load. For more than 70 years, we have been a source of strength and support for anyone living with a life-limiting illness or grief. Dying and grief are universal experiences, but too many people face them alone. We are a safe and reassuring hand you can reach for. From providing care and support for someone at the end of their life to helping someone manage their grief, we know there is no one size fits all when it comes to how we cope and the help we need. We campaign for everyone who is approaching the end of their life or grieving to have access to the right support, at the right time. And we seek to break down the barriers to talking about dying and grief - so we can all be better prepared and better equipped to be there for each other.

We can make a positive difference during even the darkest of times. Whether in the last months, weeks or days of life, or living with grief, we help people live the best life they possibly can. We are there when it matters.

**For more information contact [campaigns@sueryder.org](mailto:campaigns@sueryder.org)**

<sup>4</sup> [https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc\\_summary\\_report\\_low-res.pdf](https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/xube5elb/ukbc_summary_report_low-res.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sueryder.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A%20better%20route%20through%20grief%20report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> 07240 - Bereavement in the workplace Report A4 20pp.indd (sueryder.org)

