



The associations between  
Parental Childhood Bereavement  
and  
Delinquent Behaviour.

Dr Ana Draper, Macmillan Systemic Psychotherapist, Herts Community Trust.



## **Background:**

This presentation considers the effects of parental bereavement in childhood, which was part of a wider study exploring the future for children who experience a parent's death.

What is already established by research into parental death in childhood.

Why it is an area of importance for research to be Undertaken.





## Methodology

An attempt to establish delinquency rates in parentally bereaved children.

### *The Data*

The data collated by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

And compared with statistics from the National Development Study of children born in Britain in 1958.

The focus of the data was on children who were parentally bereaved, with a non-parentally bereaved group of children used as a control group.



## Cont..

The study used data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) of 17,416 children born in the same week in 1958 (CLS 2005).

NCDS data collected at age 16 included a Teacher's Assessment of the cohort child using the Rutter Behaviour Scale, an identified and approved measure used to quantify and define delinquency.

Other variables taken into account in the analysis were The age and gender of the child and the child's social class background





## *Method of Analysis*

*Pearson Chi Square statistics were used to investigate whether there was any relationship between indications of delinquent behaviour.*

Also examined was the relationship between parental bereavement and delinquent behaviour as moderated by social class background, gender of child, gender of dead parent and age of child at the time of bereavement.

Logistic regression models were used so that the effects of gender and social class background could be discounted when measuring the experience of parental bereavement and scoring 9+ on the Rutter Behaviour Scale.



## *Ethics*

*The subject explored by the research is emotive, and anyone taking part in an interview would be vulnerable in the exploration.*

*The use of secondary data avoided this ethical dilemma.*





# Findings

## Bereavement incidence

By the age of 16, a total of 7.6% of cohort members had experienced a parental death.

Children from manual backgrounds are significantly more likely than those from non-manual backgrounds to be parentally bereaved

significantly higher incidence of paternal bereavement than of maternal bereavement before the age of 16



## **Findings**

### **Delinquent behaviour in the general population**

**Gender was a significant factor in scoring 9+ at 16 for non-parentally-bereaved children but not for parentally bereaved children**

**Those from manual social class backgrounds were more likely to score 9+ on the Rutter Behaviour Scale at 16 than those from non-manual backgrounds**





## **Findings**

### **Delinquent behaviour in bereaved children**

**Children parentally bereaved before age 16 were significantly more likely than those who were not, to score 9+ at age 16. This significance is amplified for children parentally bereaved between the ages of 12 and 16**

**Being maternally bereaved between the ages of 12 and 16 increases by 137% the likelihood that at 16 you will score 9+ on the Rutter scale, whilst for paternal bereavement, there is an increase by 50%. However, either parent dying before the age of 12 appears to have no significant effect on scoring 9+ at age 16.**



## **Findings**

### **Delinquent behaviour in bereaved children**

**For those from non-manual backgrounds, there was no significant difference between parentally bereaved and non-parentally-bereaved children in terms of the percentages scoring 9+ at 16 , except for an indication of increased risk for children maternally bereaved when aged 12-16.**

**Of children from manual backgrounds, significantly more who were parentally bereaved before the age of 16 scored 9+ at 16 than those who not parentally bereaved before age 16**





# Logistic Regression Analysis

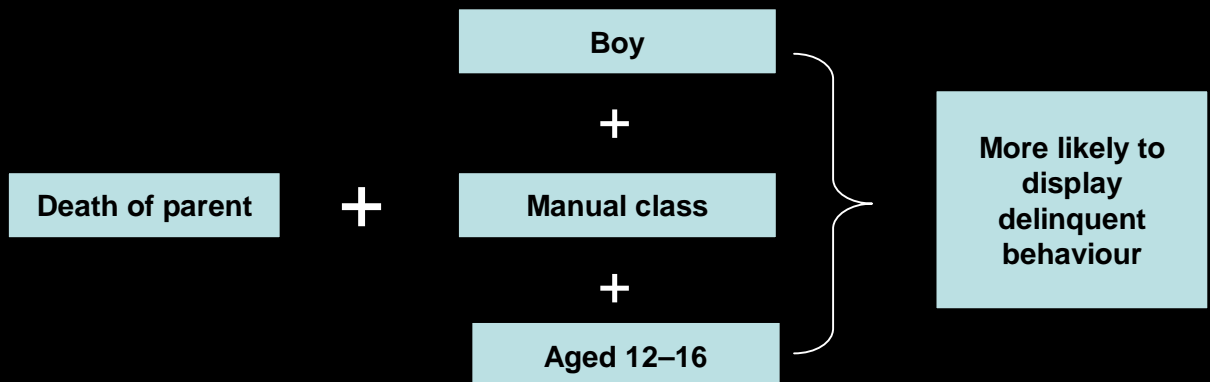
**Table 6: Results of Logistic Regression showing the effect of parental bereavement, gender and social class on scoring 9+ on the Rutter Behaviour Scale at age 16**

	Sig.	Odds Ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
			Lower	Upper
Mother died when CM aged 12-16	<.001	2.37	1.53	3.69
Father died when CM aged 12-16	.011	1.50	1.10	2.04
Mother died when CM aged 8-11	.716	1.12	.62	2.02
Father died when CM aged 8-11	.181	1.38	.86	2.22
Mother died before CM aged 7	.174	0.52	.21	1.33
Father died before CM aged 7	.338	1.24	.80	1.93
Gender (boys compared to girls)	<.001	1.44	1.30	1.60
Social class (manual compared to non-manual)	<.001	2.41	2.13	2.74

Mother died categories include cases where father also died before the child was aged 16 years. Control group for bereavement is non-parentally bereaved at age 16.



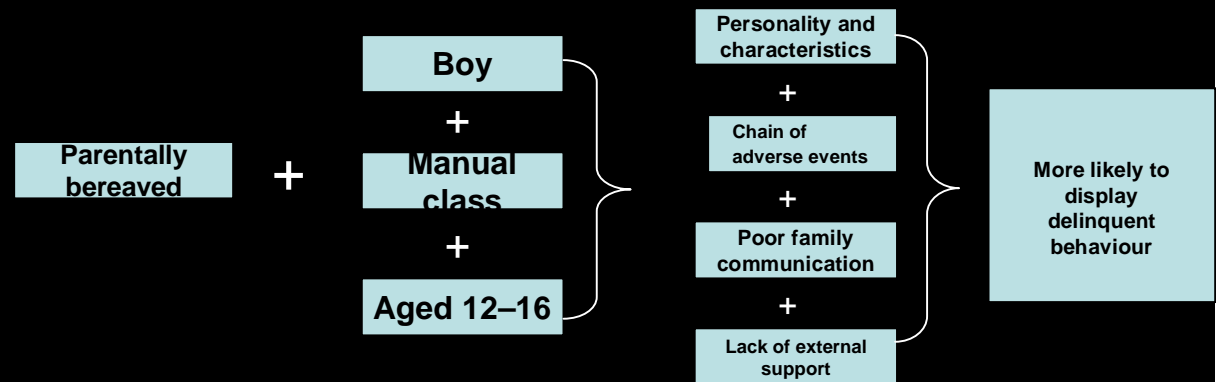
# Compromised resilience







# Compromised resilience





## Conclusion

The findings of our study have shown that any child who is parentally bereaved is significantly more likely, across population, to score on the Rutter scale for delinquent behaviour

The aftermath of parental death is complex, in that it is informed by a web of interrelated variables.

There is a need to check the results of this study with other longitudinal data, to see whether the findings are historically and politically embedded and therefore relevant only to the 1958 cohort





## The voice of the child

***“My dad died and then I started going a bit weird in the head. And I started running away and robbing.”***

***(15 year old female offender Youth Justice Board 2000/2001)***

***“Mum died a fortnight ago. I’m in a home. I cry myself to sleep.”***  
***A caller to childline.***

***“Dad came to my bed this morning. He said it wouldn’t hurt. Mum died and I miss her”***  
***A caller to childline.***



## ***John's story***

***John appears before a Court yet again. The Local Authority is applying for a Secure Order to hold John in a secure unit for his own safety. John is on an 18-month Supervision Order. This is his third community sentence in the last two years, with all his offences related to abuse of alcohol and amphetamines. The Court hears of John's numerous episodes of absconding from foster placements, of his illicit accommodation with a well-known adult drug dealer, of his behaviour leading up to his latest overdose. The Bench grants a Secure Order. John is not safe in the community. He is a risk to himself and others. John is only 14 years old. His dad died in a motorcycle accident when he was 8 years old. He wakes up every night in the middle of a horrific nightmare where he relives his father's head on colliding with a telegraph pole at 60 miles an hour. He has said to his caseworker that speed and cider let him sleep. As he is taken to his £3000 a week secure cell he cries out for help.***