

Kent E. Webb, LCSW, PCC.

A Father's Early Death: A Family's Response

Bowen theory and its phenomenon of emotional shock wave and after-shocks are used to account for the significant amount of disruption and dysfunction that occurred within our nuclear family after my father's death, age 51. The emotional shock wave was my father's death creating three major emotional after-shocks that reverberated within in the system for years resulting in serious problems for quite sometimes for my mother, my brother, and myself.



Bowen theory identifies three variables that determine the length of time it takes a family system to establish equilibrium after the death of a family member: the level of differentiation in the family or the family's functional level of emotional integration when the death occurred; the emotional importance of the person who died to the family; and the degree of denial in the family regarding its level of fusion/dependence between its members.

I described the emotional process present in our multi-generational family over three generations that impacted how the 3 variables were experienced in the family. First, the level of differentiation with the multi-generational system was low reflected by the system's principles, beliefs, and functioning. For example, marriages and intense emotionally fused relationships were utilized by myself, my brother, my mother as well as by many others in the extended family to manage fear, anxiety, to soothe pain, to gain self, and to stabilize their functioning. Second, my father was a very emotionally important person to the family. He was its emotional rudder, and he provided stability for our nuclear family through his principles, and his leadership behaviors.

3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory



Third, there was a high degree of emotional dependence/fusion present within the multi-generational and nuclear family and with a significant amount of denial present about that dependence. Numerous examples were provided to illustrate how each variable played out within the system.

This 20-minute presentation fits well into the conference theme as it provides a clinical lens for how a family with a low-level differentiation might present post the death of an emotionally important family member in the form of after-shocks even a number of years post the family member's death.

References

Bowen, M.: Family Therapy in Clinical Practice. Jason Aronson Inc., New York & London 1978.

3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory

Sörbyn, Swedish Lapland, Sweden June 15-17 2020.
Kerstin Sofia Andersson, Coordinator
kerstinsofia@bowen2020.com
<https://bowen2020.com/>