

# “Being Strong” in the wake of tragedy: Supporting fathers after their loss of a child

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## UIH Family Partners: Mission for service, Mission for research

**Mission:** Empowering men, fathers, and families to achieve self-sufficiency

**Vision:** “Every father is positively impacting his children and family- socially, emotionally, and economically.”

UIH upholds their original goal from 1859 to help children and strengthen families through a focus on fatherhood programs.

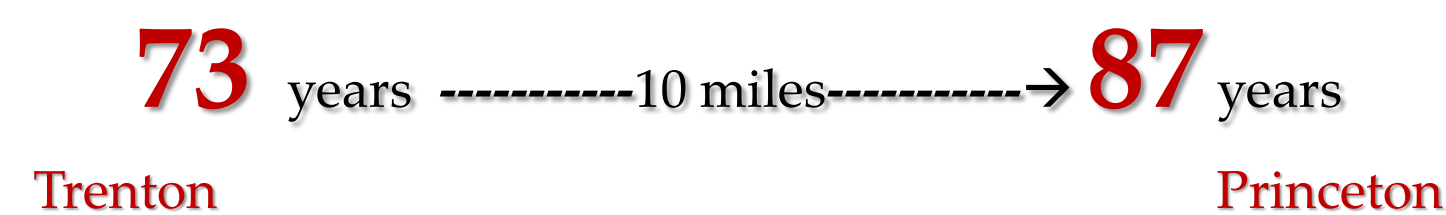
## ? Research Question ?

**Field work:** Motivated by the stories from men who spoke of the loss of their child during their small group session, I became curious as to how fathers cope while still feeling the need to be a support for their families, and how UIH could support this goal.

**In a society so entrenched with gender stereotypes, how can fathers’ needs be recognized, addressed, and supported after the loss of a child?**

## ‘Manly’ Coping with Unexpected Death: Geographic and Historical Background

While this issue is geographically broad since unexpected death due to accidents, violence, or illnesses such as cancer do not discriminate, families in the Trenton area may be more at risk to experience more cases of young death, as it has an overall lower life expectancy than other nearby cities in New Jersey.



The idea that men must ‘stay strong’ and hide their pain in such a tragedy is historically deep because cultural norms and generational teaching by fathers to their sons that it is ‘not manly’ to express emotion perpetuates a stereotype which sets unrealistic bars which grieving fathers feel they are expected to uphold.

“The tremendous weight is just trying to be the solid wall and be strong for the whole family... But it wears on me, too.”

## Supporting grieving fathers as a Socio-Medical concern

Social problem because impacts the way a family is able to function, and how the father is able to engage as a member of society

- Distracts and affects his work as he constantly struggles to effectively manage his emotions and grief
- Strains the relationships men have with others as they simultaneously isolate themselves and crave to also be helped in their grief, as many notice the support their wives receive, but feel resources aren’t equally provided

Medical in the fact that studies on how to help grieving fathers are often published in medical journals for nurses or journals on the topic of death

- This type of care is intended to be implemented in part by nurses if the child dies in a hospital (either due to a birth complication, a chronic illness or after an emergency visit) so that they can begin offering support before the father even leaves the facility

## Key Concepts and Insights

### Death, Care, & the Art of Caregiving

In “Regarding the Pain of Others” Sontag notes that many will want to ignore empathizing with a pain that is not directly impacting them. Such a practice applies to family tragedies, too, but such a response is not helpful to a grieving parent who wants their pain to be recognized as real.

### Notions of Family

When a father loses a child, it not only makes an extremely altered change in the family dynamic, but the roles in the family are also tested. The father loses a special bond which was unique to one child, and may feel the incident has attacked his ability to perform his role as the ‘protector’ or “support person” to his spouse or remaining children

**Fathers require and desire to be viewed as an equal member in the grieving process not just the “support person” to a spouse.**

**Through programs like UIH’s small groups which take a humanistic approach to care by being explicitly for fathers, by fathers, men have access to resources with permission to express their emotions without jeopardizing their societal role.**

## Acknowledgments

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## References

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