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## Men lag behind in grieving over family suicides

**Maggie Ng**

Men who have lost a loved one due to suicide take longer to begin the grieving process than women do, a university study has found.

Gender stereotyping and the "role" of men in families were cited as to why they took longer to start to process their emotions.

The study, by Hong Kong and Baptist universities, covered the experiences of 11 women and seven men from Project Bless, a support network for those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

Dr Simon Chan, an assistant professor at Baptist University, said men felt pressured by patriarchal society to prioritise family stability at times of crisis. Because men had to look after other grieving family members and deal with practical matters such as funeral arrangements, it was not until a few months after the person had died that they began to face their own emotional responses, Chan said.

Moreover, men were socialised to keep their feelings to themselves. "Society requires men to be 'manly' and doesn't accept men who cry," Chan said. Many were unwilling and unable to talk about their loss.

Women, however, began to grieve as soon as they learned of the suicide, Dr Amy Chow Yin-man, an assistant professor at HKU, said. Women re-

quired continued support, company and a sense of direction while they grieved, she said.

Relatives suffered from additional pain brought on by the reactions of others. Mrs Lee, whose teenage son committed suicide in 2006, said her friends did not know how to react to her loss, despite their good intentions.

They wanted to celebrate her birthday, which came a month after her son's death, but she was hurt every time she read "Happy Birthday" on greeting cards because she felt that she could never be happy again.

Chow hoped that through education the public would realise there were often many causes of suicide, as this would reduce the incidence of family members being blamed for the death.

Lee, whose son had depression, said it was painful when others attributed his death to family problems.

Through raising awareness of the pain experienced by those who have lost loved ones, Chow hopes to crush the myth believed by those contemplating suicide that their death could alleviate the burden on their family.

There were 962 cases of suicide in Hong Kong last year, and almost 6,000 people have been put on watch for suicide prevention, according to Suicide Prevention Services.