Background

Sudden and unexpected death represents a severe life event incorporating multiple stressors and is potentially more traumatizing than natural deaths. Religiosity is an important resource in everyday life and may be especially important during times of loss.

Objectives

The aim of this presentation is to explore whether and how religiosity and folk religiosity are important in the coping process after sudden and unexpected death in Sámi areas in Norway.

Method

The data is part of “The North Norwegian Bereavement Study” consisting of two samples, “the community sample” and “the bereaved sample”. Both quantitative (self-administered questionnaire) and qualitative methodology (in-depth interviews) were applied, and this presentation concerns the findings from the latter sample. A hermeneutic phenomenological research method was applied, using a semi-structural in-depth interview guide to investigate the experiences of 30 bereaved people from different Sámi areas in Northern Norway.

Results

Three major themes of importance for religious coping were found: Rituals, After death communication, and Signs and warnings. The findings will be discussed in relation to: a) the pre-Christian Sámi worldview, and b) the function of a safe place to grieve and the significance of accepting death.

Conclusions

Religiosity may be a great resource of help in the grieving process of the bereaved, and especially coping strategies based on local culture as it is integrated in everyday life. It is important that health care personnel are culturally sensitive and acknowledge the experience and significance of religiosity in the bereavement process.

References

Anne Silviken, Lena S. Gundersen, Gro Berntsen and Kari Berntsen, Sudden and unexpected death in Sámi areas in Norway - A qualitative study of the significance of religiosity in the bereavement process." Suicidology online (in press)