

# Grief vs. Depression: A Defining Line in Older Adults with Age Related Macular Degeneration

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ABSTRACT

## Objective

This study measured grief and depression in older adults with age related macular degeneration (AMD). Its aim was to assess the changes in mood, actions, and behaviors that typically occur in one third of older adults affected with AMD and to identify the orientation of these changes as being symptoms of both depression and grieving.

## Materials and Participants

The Grief Diagnostic Instrument (GDI) and the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) were used to assess grief and depression in this study. The data were collected online from a sample of 115 participants: 72 women and 43 men with ages ranging from 55- 85 years old.

## Results

Data indicated that 56% of all participants were grieving and/or depressed. It was also revealed that both the number of grieving participants and the severity of grief were found to be greater among those with AMD than without. In participants with AMD, 65% were grieving and 28% expressed moderate to severe grief. In participants without AMD, 42% were grieving but only 2% expressed moderate to severe grief. It was also found that the GDS is inclusive of grief factors.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that people with AMD express more grief and depression symptoms than those without AMD. There is a need for further investigation on the impact of grief in older adults with AMD and the comorbid effects of grieving and depression on the rehabilitation process.

## Procedure

To facilitate the online method of data collection we created an AMD behavioral response survey website. The website included an informed consent form, links to the survey, information and support group websites and researcher contact information. In order to participate in the study all participants were asked to first read the informed consent form and then agree to participate by clicking on a survey link. The survey link took the participants to a password encoded online independent survey collection site. All questionnaires were completed voluntarily and anonymously online through this password locked site. Upon completion of the survey, the participants were automatically linked back to the AMD behavioral response survey website's information and links page. A follow-up mailing including the findings of the study along with general information on seeking help for grief was sent out to all participants who provided an e-mail address.



Table 1: Demographics

Age Group	GDI Score (M, SD)		GDS Score (M, SD)	
	With AMD	Without AMD	With AMD	Without AMD
55-64	4	4	15	12
65-74	9	16	22	18
75-84	14	19	25	20
85+	16	20	27	22
Total	39	71	27	21



## Identifying Grief and Depression

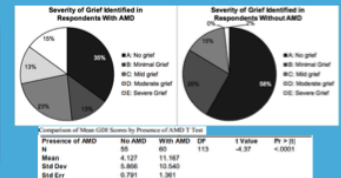
Results show that in 115 respondents, 65% of participants with AMD experience mild to severe grief and 32% experience mild to severe depression. Likewise, 42% of participants without AMD expressed mild to severe grief and 5% expressed mild to severe depression. These findings are consistent with previous studies that identified depression in 1/3 of individuals with AMD and in less than 10% of the general population (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010). To further understand these differences a three way MANOVA (presence of AMD x age x gender) was performed using GDI and GDS scores as dependent variables. It was found that individuals with AMD scored significantly higher on the GDI ( $F(1, 113) = 22.37, p < .0001$ ) and GDS ( $F(1, 113) = 15.50, p = .0002$ ) scales than those without AMD. An interaction effect of the presence of AMD and gender was also found for GDI ( $F(1, 113) = 9.13, p = .0032$ ) and GDS ( $F(1, 113) = 4.10, p = .0456$ ).

Average GDI Section B and Section C Scores by Gender and Presence of AMD

Presence of AMD	Gender	Section B (M, SD)		Section C (M, SD)	
		With AMD	Without AMD	With AMD	Without AMD
With AMD	Male	1.8	1.2	1.2	1.0
	Female	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.2
Without AMD	Male	1.2	1.0	1.0	0.8
	Female	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.0

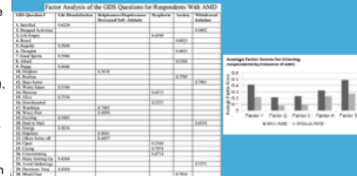
## Perception of Severity of Grief

To examine the perception of severity of grieving, the GDI scores were tallied for the total amount of grieving participants and then broken down into groups based upon these scores and the presence of a diagnosis of AMD. Tally totals showed that 28% of those grieving with AMD considered their loss to be moderate to severe versus only 2% of those without. A t-test was performed between participants with and without AMD. The results show that those individuals with AMD scored higher (Mean = 11.2, SD = 10.540) than those without AMD (Mean = 4.1, SD = 5.866) ( $t(113) = -4.57, p < .001$ ) (see Table 3).



## GDI Inclusivity in GDS

In order to determine whether the GDS is inclusive of behavioral symptoms associated with grieving, a correlation coefficient was computed between the scores of the GDI and GDS. As expected, a strong relationship between the two scores was found ( $r = .6852, p < .0001$ ). Next, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the GDS scores of participants with AMD and identified five factors: life dissatisfaction (e.g., "Are you basically satisfied with your life?"), dysphoria (e.g., "Do you often feel downhearted and blue?"), helplessness/hopelessness/decreased self-attitude (e.g., "Do you often feel helpless?"), anxiety (e.g., "Do you frequently worry about the future?"), and withdrawal/isolation (e.g., "Do you prefer to avoid social gatherings?") (Table 4). Based upon the averaged factor scores of grieving participants with and without AMD, the GDS factors of life dissatisfaction and withdrawal and isolation, appear the most prominent symptoms of grieving in individuals with AMD.



## Discussion

The results revealed depressive symptoms among the 32% of the respondents with AMD. It also identified grieving in 54% of all participants. Since, to a certain extent, grief and grieving among older adults is to be expected due to losses caused by the natural progression of life and death, this is not surprising. It is, however, interesting to note that 36% of those who were found to be grieving showed no signs of depression. This illustrates a measurable difference between grief and depression with regard to the symptomology, course and prognosis of each condition. Most bereaved individuals will undergo the course of a normal grieving process that will resolve itself in a "more or less adaptive way" within a 24 month period of time following a loss (Zhang, El-Jawahri, & Prigerson, 2006). However, the findings of this study indicated that in most participants with AMD, the grieving process did not follow the normal course. Data revealed that in 85% of participants with AMD, the grieving process remained unresolved after two years. In fact, in participants with AMD, not only had the grieving process gone beyond the normal processing period, but the perception of loss and its severity was shown to be considerably greater than in those participants without AMD. When the total amount of grieving participants was broken down by perceived severity of loss, 28% of those grieving with AMD considered their loss to be moderate to severe versus only 2% of those without. Furthermore, this study identified "Life Dissatisfaction" as the leading factor that impacts the grieving process in AMD patients. This suggests that interventions that address this aspect might prove effective. Further research aimed at the identification of compounding factors such as these in AMD patients could lead to the development of more effective treatment plans.

FINDINGS

IMPLICATIONS