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Washington, June 22 (ANI): We all experience the pain grief brings at some point of our lives. Some ultimately adapt to it but for a substantial minority, it's impossible to let go. Now, a group of researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has provided an insight as to why individuals can't get over a loss.

Reporting in the journal NeuroImage, scientists at UCLA suggest that such long-term or complicated grief activates neurons in the reward centers of the brain, possibly giving these memories addiction-like properties.

This study is the first to compare those with complicated and noncomplicated grief, and future research in this area may help psychologists do a better job of treating those with complicated grief, according to Mary-Frances O'Connor, UCLA assistant professor of psychiatry and lead author of the study.

"The idea is that when our loved ones are alive, we get a rewarding cue from seeing them or things that remind us of them," O'Connor said.

“After the loved one dies, those who adapt to the loss stop getting this neural reward. But those who don’t adapt continue to crave it, because each time they do see a cue, they still get that neural reward. Of course, all of this is outside of conscious thought, so there isn’t an intention about it,” she added.

The study analyzed whether those with complicated grief had greater activity occurring in either the brain’s reward network or pain network than those with noncomplicated grief.

In the research, the team looked at 23 women who had lost a mother or a sister to breast cancer. (Grief is very problematic among survivors of breast cancer patients, particularly among female family members who have increased risk based on their family history).

They found that, of that number, 11 had complicated grief, and 12 had the more normal, noncomplicated grief.

Each of the study participants brought a photograph of their deceased loved one and were shown this picture while undergoing brain scanning by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Next, they were scanned while looking at a photograph of a female stranger.

The authors looked for activity in the nucleus accumbens, a region of the brain most commonly associated with reward and one that has also been shown to play a role in social attachment, such as sibling and maternal affiliation. They also examined activity in the pain network of the brain, including the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex and the insula, which has been implicated in both physical and social pain.

They found that while both groups had activation in the pain [network](#) of the brain after viewing a picture of their loved one, only individuals with complicated grief showed significant nucleus accumbens activations. (ANI)

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