

# **Catastrophic grief and associated defences in elderly child holocaust survivors**

**Tracey Farber**

Private practice

**Gillian Eagle**

University of the Witwatersrand

**Cora Smith**

University of the Witwatersrand

## **Abstract**

This article is based on a qualitative, multiple interview-based study that was conducted into the long-term impact of the Holocaust on nine child survivors who were interviewed in their old age. The study aimed to explore aspects of their life trajectories with an emphasis on the negotiation of the late life task of Integrity versus Despair (Erikson, 1965). All of the participants had been interned in concentration camps for periods during their childhood or adolescent years.

Psychodynamically informed thematic analysis was employed to identify core themes within the data corpus. The focus of this article is on traumatic and catastrophic bereavement and associated grief and the manner in which this was managed or defended against by survivors.