



# VICTIM SUPPORT

NATIONAL HOMICIDE SERVICE

## Living with loss

Long-term needs of family members  
bereaved through homicide

Ania Moroz

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[victimsupport.org.uk](http://victimsupport.org.uk)

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## Introduction

There has been an upward trend in homicides since March 2014. There were 732 killings in the year ending December 2018, an increase of 6% from 655 recorded in 2017. This is the highest number of police recorded homicide offences since 2007.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of homicide goes beyond the initial loss of human life to significantly affect the lives of family and friends of the victim, termed as 'co-victims'. Although the estimates in the literature vary greatly, the number of family members bereaved through homicide is substantial. For example, Redmond reported that there are between seven and ten bereaved family members for each murder in addition to friends, co-workers and neighbours.<sup>2</sup> While Murphy<sup>3</sup> and Ahmed and Feldman<sup>4</sup> estimated more moderate numbers (at least four and three bereaved family members, respectively).

The effect of homicide on co-victims is profound and can be long lasting.<sup>5,6</sup> Yet, the research looking into long-term effect of homicide, needs and services to address those needs is sparse.

This report looks at the long-term impact and needs of family members bereaved through homicide. It includes evidence from existing research and findings from qualitative research with former service users of the Victim Support (VS) National Homicide Service. The aim is to gain a deep understanding of the long-term impact and long-term needs of families bereaved through homicide.

## **VS National Homicide Service**

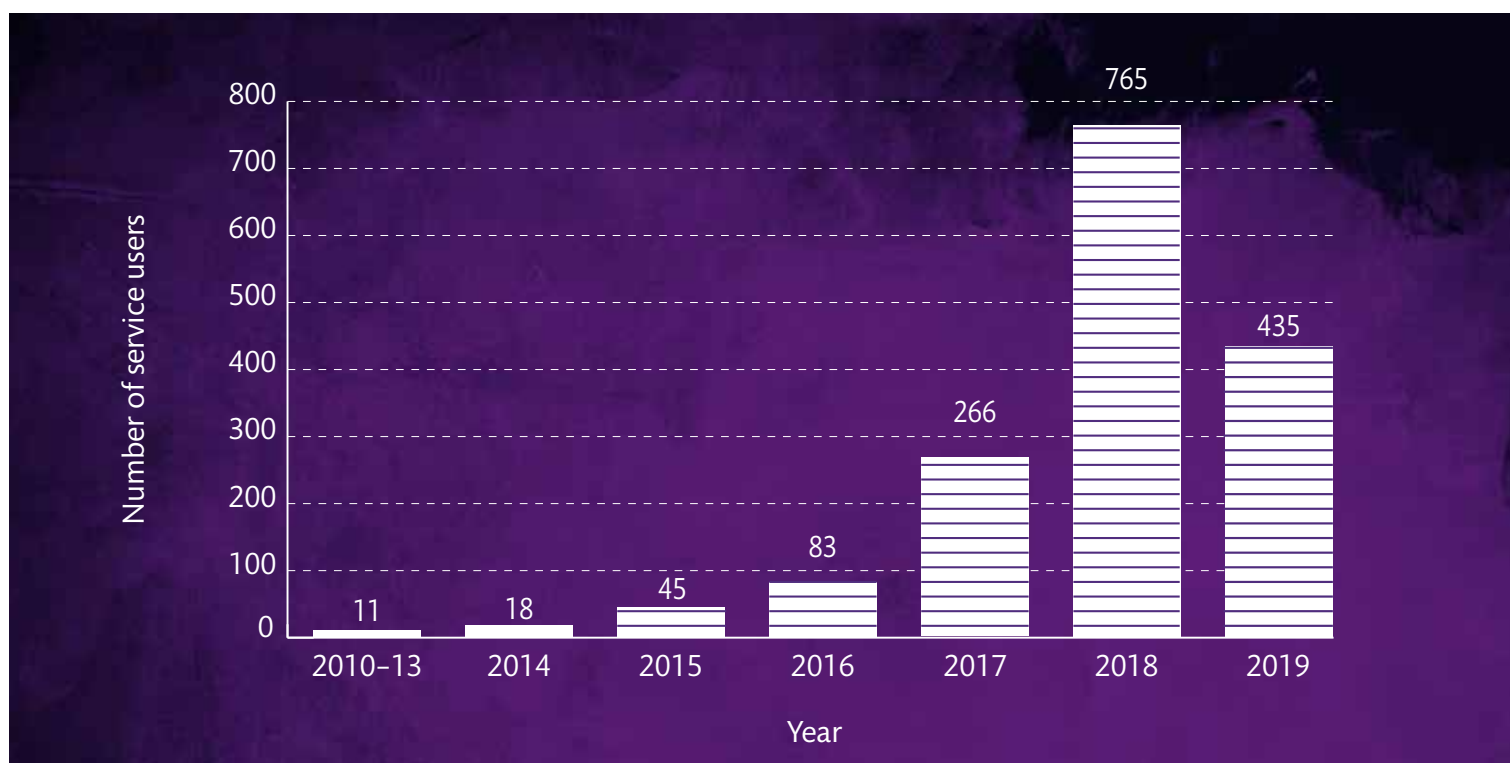
The VS National Homicide Service provides free support to people bereaved by murder and manslaughter in the UK and abroad who are resident in England and Wales. VS is commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to provide the service and works closely with the police Family Liaison Officers (FLO). FLOs are trained officers who provide a link between bereaved family members and the police during police investigations. VS National Homicide Service caseworkers work closely with the FLOs to ensure families are provided with updates and support.

Consent for a referral to the VS National Homicide Service is obtained from the family by the FLO, and a dedicated caseworker is allocated to the case. The caseworker is a consistent contact, and will support the family and individuals for as long as required. The VS National Homicide Service caseworker will undertake an initial needs assessment for each individual in the family, covering any practical, emotional and financial support that they need. This will include supporting people to navigate the criminal justice system, and offering immediate practical support such as assistance with funeral arrangements, travel to court, housing and welfare benefits, legal advice (probate, family law), and advocacy with a variety of agencies such as schools, employers and health services. Caseworkers provide ongoing emotional support alongside assessment for and referrals to trauma therapy and bereavement counselling through commissioning specialist services. Assistance can be given with compensation claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA).

## **Duration of support by VS National Homicide Service**

Although the length of support can vary greatly, on average bereaved family members are supported for 18 months.

As can be seen from Figure 1, as of May 2019 there are 1,623 service users currently supported by the VS National Homicide Service. The number of bereaved family members supported remains around this level consistently. Although the majority of cases are from year 2018 (765 service users) and 2019 (435 service users) the VS National Homicide Service still supports some service users whose case originated between the years 2010–13 (11 service users). Moreover, for various reasons, such as anniversaries or requiring assistance with housing matters, on average each year 40 service users re-engage and come back into the service.<sup>i</sup>



**Figure 1. Number of service users currently supported by the VS National Homicide Service by year of incident/first contact**

## Existing evidence on the impact of homicide and co-victims' needs

### Emotional and psychological impact

The unexpected death of a loved one by homicide can have a wide range of short and long-term emotional and psychological consequences on co-victims.<sup>7,8,9</sup> For example, a study conducted by Norris and colleagues found that 26% of family members bereaved by homicide could be considered clinically distressed.<sup>10</sup> Evidence also shows co-victims of homicide are at higher risk of developing long-term depression,<sup>11,12</sup> long-term<sup>13</sup> and life-time PTSD symptoms,<sup>14,15</sup> as well as long-lasting anxiety, panic syndromes, compulsive behaviour and obsessive revenge seeking.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Mastrocinque and colleagues reported that co-victims who lost their loved one to a homicide between three and sixteen years ago still suffer from sleepless nights, anxiety, and fear for their own and others safety.<sup>17</sup>

Recent research conducted by van Wijk and colleagues looking at the long-term impact (average five years and three months; N=28) of homicide found that more than five years after the homicide, half of the bereaved family members did not show any improvement or change in their psychological condition compared with the benchmark (ie between three weeks and three months). Some bereaved family members reported negative changes such as experiencing, amongst other things, paranoid thoughts and somatic complaints.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, previous research has also found that psychological effects of homicide are long-term with little difference between people bereaved recently and a long time ago, with symptoms getting worse rather than better over the time.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, many family members bereaved by homicide have reported blaming themselves and feeling guilty not only that they feel they did not do anything to prevent the homicide but also that they have lived. Evidence suggests that because of guilt they did not socialise even sixteen years after the homicide.<sup>20</sup>

The criminal justice process also adds to the distress. The intensity of psychological distress can increase when triggered by legal processes, as dealing with the criminal justice system adds to the trauma,<sup>21</sup> preventing the grieving process and often re-traumatising bereaved family members,<sup>22</sup> increasing symptoms of anxiety and depression and adding to the emotional pain.<sup>23</sup>

Some co-victims also reported changes in their behaviour following the incident; they started looking at the obituaries every day, sleeping with the lights on or keeping window blinds closed, or stopped sitting in front of the windows.<sup>24</sup> Other common reactions to homicide is realisation of one's vulnerability which drives family members bereaved by homicide to change daily routines, install a house alarm, not go out after dark as well as phobic avoidance of everything related to the homicide, such as people or places.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, almost all participants in van Wijk and colleagues' research stated that the crime has changed them forever; they were less self-effacing, less sensitive to what others thought of them, and more assertive than they use to be. Some bereaved family members become more afraid of losing other loved ones as well.<sup>26</sup> Co-victims also reported changing the way in which they viewed the world.<sup>27</sup>

In order to cope with the emotional distress bereaved family members may use prescribed psychotropic drugs; one study found that following a murder 56% of participants were prescribed psychotropic medication to deal with psychological impact of the crime.<sup>28</sup> Co-victims of homicide were also twice as likely compared to victims of other crimes to develop drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>29,30,31</sup>

It has been found that it often takes between three and five years for grief symptoms to begin to subside among co-victims of homicide,<sup>32</sup> although some co-victims reported no time limit for grieving process.<sup>33</sup> Evidence suggests that although feelings of grief reduced and become less intense over time, worsening only at significant times such as birthdays, holidays or the anniversary of the death, the feeling of loss grew stronger.<sup>34,35</sup> It has also been found that problematic bereavement appears in the form of serious psychological disorders such as traumatic grief,<sup>36,37</sup> complicated grief, as well as debilitating, long lasting and often life-threatening grief responses such as prolonged grief disorder.<sup>38,39,40,41</sup>

There is also evidence of the emotional or psychological effect of homicide on bereaved children. For example, it has been found that 88% of children were affected psychologically by the homicide of a family member and 77% of those affected required professional help. Although the majority (73%) of them received help it was often insufficient or not effective and many years after the bereavement children were still living with psychological impact of the homicide, showing disturbing behaviour and PTSD symptoms.<sup>42</sup> These results support findings from previous research which found that 23% of children who had one parent killed by the other developed PTSD.<sup>43</sup> Some children may not come to terms of loved one death and struggle with the psychological impact of murder they witnessed as children throughout their lives.<sup>44</sup>



## Physical impact

Many family members bereaved by homicide report a major deterioration in their physical health following the crime. For example, previous research found that 83% of participants stated that their physical health was affected and 75% reported that the physical health of their family members was affected as well, including suffering from stress and anxiety.<sup>45</sup>

Casey also found that many bereaved family members reported developing health conditions such as cancer, stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure as well as other family members dying shortly after the homicide took place.<sup>46</sup> Research suggests that common physical effects of homicide on co-victims include high blood pressure, weight loss, weight gain,<sup>47</sup> appetite loss, sleep disturbance, gastrointestinal problems, decreased resistance to infectious diseases, cardiovascular diseases and cancer.<sup>48,49,50</sup> Besides, it has been found that co-victims suffered disturbance in sleep including nightmares and irregular patterns that continued for over a year following a homicide, whereas impairment in memory and loss of concentration lasted for much longer than in normal grief.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, after the crime occurred all family members bereaved by homicide reported physical complaints such as headaches, cardiac problems, stomach and bowel problems, tiredness and sleeping problems, as well as loss of appetite. Also, many participants reported being stressed all the time because of the crime, which may cause above mentioned physical symptoms. In addition, the homicide of a loved one has been found to aggravate existing physical conditions.<sup>52</sup>

A variation on the physical impact on co-victims has been found between genders. Researchers found that men bereaved by homicide were more likely than women to suffer from heart problems and early death, whereas women were more likely to develop depression and anxiety.<sup>53</sup>

It has also been found that over the years following homicide, physical symptoms gradually lessened or even disappeared for some bereaved family members. However, for many physical symptoms remained or reappeared during, for example, the criminal justice process.<sup>54</sup> Another study looking at the needs of co-victims between around three and sixteen years after the homicide found that participants reported feeling physically sick, especially around significant dates.<sup>55</sup>

Homicide has also been linked to co-victims' premature mortality. Some research reported significant numbers of homicide co-victims dying within the first few years following the incident.<sup>56,57,58</sup> Bereavement due to a child loss as a result of both, natural and unnatural causes is also associated with increased mortality rates.<sup>59</sup> Mortality risk particularly for parents losing a child to unnatural causes four to eight years following the death was higher compared with general population.<sup>60</sup>

## Impact on relationships

Due to the intensity and unrelenting nature of grief from the loss of a loved one through homicide, family relationships may suffer. Research stresses the effect of homicide on spousal relationships, which are deeply affected and become strained as spouses may react differently to traumatic grief with some distancing themselves from their partner.<sup>61</sup> This different reaction to the grief is frequently perceived by partners as uncaring or weak.<sup>62</sup> The inability to grieve in a similar way and to support each other leads to misunderstandings and divisions within families.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, one study found that following bereavement by homicide 44% of participants become estranged, separated or divorced.<sup>64</sup>



As well as difficulties within relationships between partners', other relationships within families are affected long-term. Homicide tends to have an effect on the relationship of younger members of the family with the others.<sup>65</sup> For example, it has been found that people who lost a sibling become distant and eventually estranged from their family. In some circumstances children were placed in the care system, which resulted in losing all contact with family and friends.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, homicide can affect relationships with extended family and friends. Often extended family learns about the death from the media. This leads to directing their anger onto the immediate family members and has a negative impact on relationship between family members.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, as close friends can find it challenging or do not know how to support bereaved family members they can struggle to maintain close contact and distance themselves from the family. This in turn reduces social support, which is much needed for coping with the impact of the crime.<sup>68</sup>

Van Wijk and colleagues found that shortly after the homicide almost all bereaved family members who participated in the research avoided other people and places where they could run into familiar people, with some staying indoors so they did not have to talk about the victim and what happened. However, as the years went by, even though bereaved family members become more selective of their friends, they increased their social interactions. They were also able to talk about the victim, although some found it still difficult more than five years after the crime took place.<sup>69</sup>

Co-victims have also reported feeling isolated, lonely and lack of understanding from friends and family who reduced communication with them because they did not know how to approach the bereaved or what to say.<sup>70</sup> The ability to trust other people is also affected. For example, co-victims reported being less able to trust other people and to teaching their children not to trust other people.<sup>71</sup>

### Financial impact

As well as the emotional and physical impact and strains placed on relationships, homicide also impacts families financially. It has been estimated that the cost of homicide was £37,000 per family or £113,000 with loss of earnings included.<sup>72</sup>

The most documented impact is on employment. Casey found that 70% of bereaved family members stopped working for some period of time – which varied from under a month to over a year – following homicide. 24% of participants permanently stopped working, 31% of family members bereaved through homicide changed their jobs going into a different type of work, with 29% going into a part-time employment and 27% full-time. For 25% of participants this was for lower wages and for 20% for fewer hours.<sup>73</sup> Similar findings were reported by Mezey and colleagues who found that 27% of family members bereaved by homicide lost or left their work since the crime.<sup>74</sup>

Van Wijk and colleagues found that almost all family members bereaved by homicide experienced financial problems following the crime. This was because of a loss of the murdered person's income as well as sometimes the loss of the co-victim's job on medical grounds. Loss of earnings resulted in an inability to pay the mortgage, bills as well as incurring additional costs arising from the funeral and criminal justice proceedings.<sup>75</sup>

Other long-term costs may include dealing with the debt of unpaid bills, especially when the victim was the main 'breadwinner' and the one who managed the bills or family finances. Other costs that extend over many years include borrowing money to move house, taking loans or paying from retirement money for the funeral, paying for the legal costs, paying for long-term counselling and transport to and from health treatment.<sup>76</sup> While, with the help of crime compensation and insurance, some bereaved family members were able to pay at least part of the above-mentioned costs, more than five years after the crime happened some of them still experienced financial difficulties.<sup>77</sup>

The financial burden is also affected by increased childcare costs. 66% of families who participated in the research conducted by Casey reported that there were children who were directly affected, with 28% stating that family members were left with responsibility for caring for the children. Only 29% received financial support for the childcare. Moreover, 51% of those that obtained responsibility for the bereaved children were grandparents who often lack the additional money to support their grandchildren and needed help with buying food, nappies or clothes for the children. Families are also put in debt because of the costs from court proceedings to seek guardianship of their grandchildren when a parent was killed by the other and the perpetrator contests guardianship in court.<sup>78</sup>

### Needs of co-victims of homicide

There is limited research looking at the co-victims' long-term needs and services to address these needs. Nevertheless, it has been found that peer support groups provide valuable support for co-victims as they offer a shared understanding of what they may be going through and alleviate feelings of isolation. However, co-victims reported that they found the group most beneficial when it had other friends and families of homicide co-victims only.<sup>79</sup> Similar findings were reported by Englebrecht and colleagues who found that family members bereaved by homicide who sought help from individual counselling or general bereavement groups reported homicide support groups to be the most beneficial.<sup>80</sup>

Other services to address long-term needs include psychological interventions such as family therapy<sup>81</sup> and trauma and bereavement counselling.<sup>82</sup> Co-victims also reported that being involved in activities such as public talks, creating scholarships and fundraising helped them to deal with the death of a loved one. This was because it provided them with the opportunity to help make the community safer, create a legacy and keep their loved one's story alive. Some co-victims discussed the role of spirituality and how helpful they found it in coping with the impact of homicide.<sup>83,84</sup>



# The current study

## The aim

The aim of the research is to better understand the long-term impact of murder and manslaughter on bereaved families, their needs and the services required to best meet these needs.

## Methodology and participants

To meet the aims of the research and to gain in-depth and detailed knowledge from bereaved family members on the long-term impact of the crime on their lives, their needs and required support services that would have helped them to cope and recover qualitative research method was used.

The qualitative data collection took place between June and October 2017. It comprised of twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with former service users bereaved through murder and manslaughter, who were supported and had a managed exit from VS National Homicide Service at least two years before data collection took place.

The study group involved bereaved family members who had lost a child, partner, ex-partner, parent, or sibling. Fourteen females and six males from all regions of England and Wales participated in the research.



## Impact of homicide over time

Participants in the study were asked a set of questions on the long-term impact of the crime on their and their family's lives. The results show that the impact of the incident was extensive, affecting several aspects of life. These range from emotions and behaviour change to a significant change in care responsibilities or home life.

The research has also found that some effects changed over the time while others endured and are expected to remain a part of bereaved family members' lives forever. It also highlighted triggers at different points in the process that affected their recovery.

***"It [incident] affects every part of your life. Every relationship, every belief, it just dominates and takes over."*** Female, N

### Emotional and psychological wellbeing

The emotional and psychological long-term effects of homicide on bereaved family members taking part in this study are wide-ranging and significant. This research found five long-term emotional effects:

- Increase in anger and aggression over time
- Persistent anxiety and fear of violence and for the safety of their family members
- Feeling more protective and strict with the children

- Viewing themselves as permanently changed with no hope of life returning to how it was
- Long-term grieving process.

## 1. Increase in anger and aggression over time

Although for some of the bereaved family members the emotional and psychological impact appears to recede over time, in contrast, particular emotional responses were reported to have increased as time passed. Some of the bereaved family members said that as time goes on they and their families became angrier and more aggressive. Much of the anger is directed at the perpetrator, but participants also reported that their anger affected their social interactions, for example, not being as patient with other people as they were before the incident happened.

***“I think I became more angry, I don’t seem to have as much patience with anybody.”***  
Female, B

***“I saw something today about the guy who killed him [participant’s father] and it really broke my heart,... and I am so annoyed, so furious... I just thought how dare he [offender] kill my dad and... he [offender] has got his full life ahead of him where he can go and do whatever he wants and he has just ripped my dad’s life from underneath him, and the anger was the one thing that really, really tore me apart.”***  
Female, D

***“I’m a bit more aggressive.”*** Male, NI

***“I think the initial first year was like you were more emotional and more sad about it, whereas as time’s gone on, we’re [all family] more angry and bitter about it and it just winds you up but then it makes you sad at the same time.”*** Male, R

Feelings of anger can affect bereaved family members wider recovery. Some of the participants reported that because of this unresolved anger they cannot move on with their lives. Feelings of anger were also directed at themselves for not being able to move on or for not preventing the incident from happening in the first place. These were reported as enduring effects of the homicide.

***“You should be coping. You don’t want this hanging over your head and that’s why it sort of reflects a lot of anger as well. You think to yourself I don’t want to feel like this... It makes me a different person. It doesn’t make me any stronger, like burnt up inside, and I haven’t moved on with my life.”*** Female, AC

***“I get angry with myself. I don’t show my anger to anyone, I feel it inside. It’s not like a physical thing. It’s like something inside me where I get angry because I wish I could have done something or I wish I could have stopped it [incident] or I wish I could have done something where it would never have happened. And that’s the sort of anger I get.”*** Male, A

## 2. Persistent anxiety, fear of violence and for the safety of their family members

The majority of emotional and psychological effects of the homicide have endured and are shown to be long-term. Several years after the incident many bereaved family members feel anxious and fearful, not only of violence but for the safety of other members of their family. Participants also reported particular fear for their own safety when the offender is released from prison. The research found that anxiety and feelings of fear persist.

***“I guess I’m a lot more apprehensive and a lot more sort of scared about things than I used to be, fearful of things happening... Since it [incident] has happened to me and my family I think you know it just makes everything else so possible. I realise quite how fragile life can be now whereas before I didn’t.”*** Female, AN

***“I had quite a few sessions about a year ago, like counselling and CBT therapy but I am still very [anxious]... I am quite an anxious person now; I don’t think I was in the past. It’s quite hard to deal with when you really think the worst is going to happen. When my husband is late home from work I start getting a bit panicky that there has been a car crash and something awful has happened... I know it’s ridiculous but you can’t help yourself.”*** Female, J

***“One of the things that goes in my head sometimes, my main fear, is something is going to happen to another member of my family. I’ve always got this fear, I see danger, I see a lot of danger, especially with the grandchildren... My daughter is a fire fighter, and I see danger all the time in her job and I worry about her and what could happen. I never used to worry about her, because I know she’s in a safe enough environment really, but I think I see more fear in everything.”*** Female, C

***“I have got a reception desk at work that knows what he [offender] looks like, they have actually seen a picture of him [offender] and they have printed it off... So they [reception desk at work] know if this psychopath decides to come looking for me one day, what he looks like. That is stupid isn’t it? You shouldn’t have to live your life like that.”*** Female, D

The impact on bereaved family members’ sense of safety can have long-term effect on their everyday life resulting in changes in their lifestyle, behaviour and even place of living or work.

***“I moved away because I couldn’t be in a situation where I was constantly thinking would I see this person [offender] walking down the street because they never went to jail, so they still live in the same vicinity. And I couldn’t cope with that. So I kind of just ran away from things I think.”*** Female, S

***“The person that hit [victim’s name] is now out of prison on licence and he [offender] lives quite local, so we tend not to go shopping in that town and I don’t know what we’d do if we actually met him... I don’t know how I would react, to be quite honest. It’s gone through my head so many times, if I met him [offender], what I would actually feel like doing.”*** Female, C

***“You are not the same person again afterwards [the incident], are you? And so, I think I will always be a very reactive now, shocked. I work as a nurse... I have worked in A&E departments a lot. I have always been around emergency situations, but what I have found now, is that I can no longer do that because I can’t really cope with it... I am very scared of knives, because my dad’s throat was cut.”*** Female, N

### 3. Feeling more protective and strict with the children

Some family members bereaved by murder and manslaughter also described being more protective and strict with their children. This was voiced as lasting change to how they approach being a parent.

***“I definitely think my temper, which I didn’t even think I had one, I think is a lot shorter now than it has ever been to be honest with you. I definitely think it had a detrimental effect on my personality... It doesn’t take much for me to now be quite strict with the kids whereas I wasn’t like that before my dad [victim] went, I know for a fact I wasn’t.”*** Female, D

***“So protective. We’re all protective and I’m certainly a lot more strict with both of the children. We’re both sort of protective and snappy [towards children].”*** Male, R

#### **4. Viewing themselves as permanently changed with no hope of life returning to how it was**

As well as highlighting emotions that remain over time, the research highlighted a number of ways that bereaved family members viewed themselves as permanently changed and with no hope of life returning to how it was. They felt that the incident had changed their personality and that they are now a different person. Although they may have better or worse days, many bereaved family members stated that their lives and their family lives were forever changed and that they will live with the effect of the crime for the rest of their lives.

***“Life will never be the same... They get easier but there are some days where you’re stronger than others. There’s days of anger. You don’t put the past to rest. It’s always there. So definitely I don’t think anyone is ever the same after a murder. No one is ever the same.”*** Female, AC

***“I think it’s [incident] always going to affect us... We’ve got to carry on and do what you need to do. You can’t just stop because something bad happened. If you stop and think about it, we’d both be emotional wrecks and wouldn’t be able to do anything and there’d be two children suffering in it as well.”*** Male, R

***“I don’t get anxious on his [victim’s] birthday, I don’t get anxious for the memories, none of that matters because it doesn’t matter what day it is, I still miss him just as much... I don’t think I will ever be able to rectify losing my dad that way.”*** Female, D

***“I feel like I’m just surviving almost, I’m not living, I’m not as happy at all,... I try to put on a brave face with everybody, get on with life, I’m getting on with my life, but there’s always something missing. We were just such a together couple that we did everything, went everywhere and we were just happy together, and now I’m just this single person, just almost I don’t know, surviving, living, just getting on with my life, but each day at a time really, it’s not the same.”*** Female, C

Even though it has been several years after the incident some bereaved family members are still very much impacted psychologically and need medication or psychological therapies to cope with the impact of the crime.

***“I’m on medication for depression.”*** Male, R

***“I did have to think about seeking out some counselling this year... I do definitely think that there is some sort of switch after a period of time and the people think, you know, oh well it’s such a long time ago. But it’s still quite fresh in my mind even though it is five/six years ago [since the incident].”*** Female, S





## 5. Long-term grieving process

As well as causing fear, knowing that offender walks free restricts bereaved family members grieving process. This was expressed as a reason for the participants not to be able to make progress in their recovery over time.

***“There was some grief and [we] were able to start mourning, but we [family] were never able to fully do it,... because you just never know what’s happening, like, one [offender] of them is already out, one’s coming out this year and then, because I’m the point of contact with everybody, it makes it harder, because if I get emotional about it then it makes it really hard to cope.”*** Male, K

***“You’re on a roller coaster ride, the case is still open. When you see people on Facebook that have just clearly got away with murder and they’re expressing that they just had a child and how lovely that is, and you think well my son [victim] had that, you’ve took that away and you’ve paid nothing in fact you have paid no price at all for what you’ve done.”*** Female, JE

Within an acceptance that grief from the homicide will be long-term some participants expressed the variation in days and times when they would feel better.

***“It’s like a seesaw, you go up and you go down and even now there [are] periods when certain things bring up experiences and your emotions go down and your emotions go up, it’s all the time, it’s just a roller coaster ride that gets slightly smoother each year. That’s the best way to describe it.”*** Female, JE

***“Those are probably the two extremes [self-pity and get on with life] I feel but I just get on with it. But, then I go through a time when I feel really sorry for myself.”***  
Female, D

***“It’s further on in time but you know, it’s up and down isn’t it? Sometimes I get quite depressed with the whole situation and then sometimes you think I have just got to get on with it really.”*** Female, J

For some emotional and psychological impact of the crime could worsen and come to force at certain moments such as birthdays, holidays or anniversaries of victims' death and criminal justice process. These were seen to affect recovery long term, as they bring back negative emotions consistently every year.

***"I have bad days and I don't go to work on certain days of the year, like, I don't go to work on the [date of victim's death and finding body] or the [date of trial and sentencing]. It affects me more on those days... It's not something I'm going to get over. It's something you have to try and deal with as best you can. It's [incident] always in the back of your mind, it comes to the fore on those days [incident and trial]... it's more like a build up of anxiety towards them."*** Male, K

***"I always struggle around the time of [victim's name] birthday and also Christmas. This is the first Christmas that we're actually going to spend together as a family [six years after the incident], because it has just been too difficult before now... We don't celebrate Christmas and I think that is a very hard time."*** Female, S

***"You don't want the low days and you don't want the bad days but yeah at the end of the day, they can come round and hit you on special occasions like his [victim's] anniversary, when it's the first year, two years and birthdays and [you think] what age he [victim] would have been."*** Female, AC

***"We have moments that are difficult there are no doubts, and there are times anniversaries, birthdays, my brother's birthday and Christmas and those times are very difficult."*** Female, AN

## Physical wellbeing and health

The crime had also long-term impact on bereaved family members' physical health. The research found four main long-term physical effects:

- Acute pain
- Change in cognitive function
- Insomnia and occasional flashback
- Drink and antidepressants dependency.

### 1. Acute pain

Bereaved family members reported developing long-term physical symptoms as a result of stress and anxiety following the incident. The symptoms often resurfaced in intensity at different trigger points, for example, before a court case.

***"Physically I've had serious problems, which the doctor has said is severe stress, where my red blood cells and white blood cells started to fight each other. I've been diagnosed with fibromyoma ME... and Vitamin D deficiency, because I've not been going out the house for years [after the incident]... Fibromyoma is pretty awful, I've never known anything so painful in all my life and I can tell stress and anxiety brings it on. It is usually when there's a court case. It's just been so full on for the last four years, I've literally not gone a week without [seeing] a solicitor, a barrister, health and safety, policeman, just so many things... I'm not physically as strong as I was."*** Female, JU

***“I have actually got arthritis now. It could have been the shock and the stress of it [incident] could have actually brought it on... They [doctors] think it could have been the stress or the trauma of what happened [incident].”*** Female, J

***“I developed vertigo and different ailments and pains and headaches. It was just generally I think stress related.”*** Female, AC

## 2. Change in cognitive function

One participant noted not only did the incident have a long-term impact on his cognition but also on his physiology. These physical effects are ongoing.

***“My memory isn’t as good as it used to be. I don’t recall things as sharply as I used to... I found that my physiology,... I haven’t got the strong grip I had before it. It feels as if I hold something really tight and twist it it’s going to break my arm off or something. There are lots of changes in my physiological structure. I don’t know if it’s anything to do with it [incident].”*** Male, NI

## 3. Insomnia and occasional flashback

For many bereaved family members insomnia, nightmares and flashbacks become less severe over the years. However, some participants reported suffering from insomnia and occasional flashbacks a few years after the incident.

***“I couldn’t say it’s very often, it’s very rare now, but I did at the time have nightmares.”*** Female, P

***“I still have really bad dreams, horrible dreams that really affect my day. If I get up and I’ve had a bad dream I can’t get it out of my head and that is the day done then.”*** Female, S

***“For the first 12/18 months, you know, I struggled to sleep... I did used to get headaches quite a lot. I got quite stressed out and a bit of anxiety, but I sort of like I get it every now and again. But not as much if you know what I mean... every now and again.”*** Male, A

Participants in this research reported having flashbacks due to recent events such as terrorist attacks or car accidents. These mass casualty events cause bereaved family members to ruminate about the incident.

***“I found some of the terrorist things recently very difficult because that is how he [father] died... I don’t watch any violent films on TV, it has had a bit of an impact because there is so little that isn’t violent. I think that is the legacy that it [incident] leaves. And I think that is just inevitable. It’s only been four years in July. There are residual effects and I don’t know that they are avoidable really.”*** Female, N

***“I had a car accident and... you know that feeling with the authorities and the bureaucracy of things and this anger and frustration that somebody had done something, especially because we didn’t get a court case. It kind of brings those feelings up again which you think are totally disconnected. It just overwhelmed me... It took me right back to where I’ve been before having panic attacks.”*** Female, S



#### 4. Drink and antidepressants dependency

Bereaved family members also reported self-medicating with drink or antidepressants.

***“I drink a lot. I never used to drink, but now [after the incident] I do, I drink every day... You end up self-medicating, don’t you, with drink or antidepressant herbs. I take a lot of over the counter kind of natural products to help you feel better. You fall into a pattern don’t you and that becomes normal.”*** Female, S

## Social relationships

One of the areas of life that is negatively affected long-term as a result of homicide is social interaction and relationships. This research found two main long-term impacts on social relationships:

- Reduced levels of social networks and interaction
- Reduced tolerance and lack of trust towards other people.

#### 1. Reduced levels of social networks and interaction

Many bereaved family members reported that following the incident they changed their behaviour and became more isolated from their family, friends and people in general. This in turn reduces their social support network which is needed for coping with the impact of the incident.<sup>85</sup> Even though some of the participants reported that they go out occasionally with friends it isn’t as often as before the incident happened.

***“I spend a lot of time on my own... I like to just be alone, I won’t call myself a complete isolation, but I do spend time on my own.”*** Male, PW

***“I haven’t got anybody to share anything with, the good times or the bad times, good things and bad things. I think that has impacted on the family, because there’s always somebody missing... because [victim’s name] is not there.”*** Female, C

***“I think I just closed myself away in a shell... and maybe isolated myself from people... I’m not the same person at all that I was before [the incident]. I don’t socialise with people, I don’t really have many friends. I can go out, but I intensely dislike it. I don’t like socialising and also partly because I don’t like people to see how much I drink. If I go out and have a drink it’s not fun. So I just avoid all of those normal things and I just feel like this is my life now, that is how I’m going to be forever.”*** Female, S

***“I’ve gone from being extrovert [to an introvert]. I don’t like being around people. Before [the incident] I’ve always been front of house, I’ve always had really good visitors... and I just can’t do it anymore, it just feels like effort. I think that’s [incident] knocked my self-esteem, it’s really knocked me back in a corner so to speak, and everybody else can get on with it. I don’t like social visiting anymore, so I skirt around the outside of society, when nobody can see me, basically.”*** Female, JU

***“Socially I don’t have a lot of social life because I have to be back here for [granddaughter’s name]. It’s as simple as that.”*** Female, JE

## 2. Reduced tolerance and lack of trust towards other people

As well as reducing levels of social networks and interactions, being bereaved by homicide was shown to affect how you view others. Some bereaved family members reported not trusting other people and being less tolerant towards others.

***“I am cautious around other people, where I go, how much I trust people. It’s [incident] made a big difference.”*** Female, SA

***“I’ve gone a lot quieter than what I used to be, I do a lot of analysing, and I definitely don’t trust people.”*** Female, JU

***“I’ve found myself being less tolerant of people and not wanting to, you know, get involved in those conversations, where I used to before. You talk to people out of politeness sometimes with some people. Where I find I haven’t got that in me no more... It [incident] has changed me as a person. There’s no two ways about it.”***  
Male, A

However, not all of the bereaved felt isolated. Some participants stated that close relationship with friends and family helped them to cope with the impact of the incident. The importance of having a strong and supportive social circle was highlighted as a factor in helping the bereaved to manage in the aftermath of the incident.

***“I still get upset, obviously, about the whole situation. I’ve got a fantastic family, we’ve all supported each other in this, but my son and daughter have been absolutely amazing,... they’ve supported me so much... I am just so lucky they have been so supportive and we’re such a close family, because otherwise I don’t know how I would have managed, to be quite honest.”*** Female, C

***“I think we are very lucky in that I am part of a very strong and supportive and close family. So we have been able to support each other quite well. I think we’ve all made an effort to try and be as positive as we can... On the whole I would say that we have coped better than I thought we would.”*** Female, AN

***“It wasn’t very easy at the beginning, it definitely wasn’t very easy... But then I had the lads [sons], I had my husband and I had the rest of my family to help me when I was feeling down or anything like that, I always had somebody near that I could talk to... I got through everything that I’ve gone through with the help of my husband and my family.”*** Female, M

***“I stopped drinking with support from my friends and a friend of the family helped me to get through a lot of it. I went back to work and then obviously I’ve got a lot better since then.”*** Male, ST

## **Practical implications**

There are a number of administrative tasks and procedures that bereaved family members often have to follow in the immediate aftermath of a homicide. However, some family members bereaved by murder and manslaughter will be faced with long-term responsibilities such as taking over the caring duties of other family members.

***“The consequence of my sister being murdered... has had a real impact for my life because I have had to take over the caring duties, so I have got my mum living with us. I have had to give up work really which I didn’t particularly want to do.”*** Female, J

***“It’s [incident] restricted my life, it’s given me a commitment that I’m duty bound to keep, I mean morally I couldn’t give [granddaughter’s name who is victim’s child] up and put her in care. So it’s restricted my life a fair bit really, I do work part time,... but that has to be around [granddaughter’s name] because I have to be back here for when she’s finishing school.”*** Female, JE

Many bereaved family members lost not only a loved one who provided day-to-day practical support but also the companionship of doing these every day cores together. They lost a person who would help them out when they needed them.

***“I’m disabled... it was [victim’s name] who carried shopping. I’d start wall papering and if we’ve been away on holiday, come back and find that she [victim] wallpapered the bathroom, or wallpapered the bedroom... We used to go out looking around second hand shops... I lost more than just [victim’s name],... If you’ve got somebody to help you it’s much easier on lots and lots of things. [Offender name] didn’t only destroy [victim name], and her kids, but it was us [parents] as well.”***

Female, P

***“Every day, it’s not like a weekly thing where it affects it, it’s a daily thing. From something as simple as, I can remember needing to put a headboard on the kids bed and my husband was at work and I just didn’t have the strength to turn the screws as hard as I would need to and that would be a job that my dad [victim] would have done, or my car broke the other day and I had to get the RAC to come out and sort it out, that would have been a phone call, I would have just rang my dad... He [victim] was someone who I saw every day. And we did things together every day.”***

Female, D

## Financial cost

A negative long-term effect on finances was reported by many bereaved family members. This research identified three long-term financial effects:

- Costs resulting from giving up work or reducing hours at work
- Financial impact of childcare and of becoming a guardian to victim's children
- Difficulties with day-to-day bills.

### 1. Costs resulting from giving up work or reducing hours at work

Long-term impact was not only due to the costs resulting from giving up their work or reducing hours at work because of the impact of the crime, but also due to taking time off from work to attend court hearings. A loss of earnings will have significant effects while income has reduced, but also affect their longer term savings and stability.

***"I just left my job, I just thought I can't do this. I just walked out of the job basically, I didn't go back, I couldn't cope with it."*** Female, S

***"I had to give up work, I had to give that up because I was taking so much time off anyway and the stress."*** Female, JE

***"I was able to get some time off for the trial, although that was unpaid by my work. I had a period of two months where I didn't get paid. And I also decided, because of everything that had gone on for a year, I think it was just before the trial started I dropped my hours at work down from full time to part time hours."*** Female, AN

Even though some bereaved family members stayed in the workplace they lacked motivation over time. One participant described how he struggles to be inspired to work as a result of crime some years after the incident.

***"I've struggled with work, I still do now to a certain extent. I do work but it's more of a motivation thing really... I don't suffer with motivation to go to work; it's when I'm there [work], motivation to get involved in it. I still struggle with that now [a few years after the incident]."*** Male, A

### 2. Financial impact of childcare and becoming a guardian to victim's children

The loss of a parent through homicide has particular implications for the care of their child or children. Some participants taking part in the study reported also long-term financial impact as a result of becoming guardians to victims' children.

***"I had three kids [victim's children] to see to... So I've been supporting them, all our savings have gone on the boys... I'm in a lot of debt because I've been trying to help them [victim's children] get back out of debt."*** Female, P

***"I have gone back part time on reduced hours which I have never been able to increase because of the childcare situation where my dad [victim] was the answer for the childcare. So, it had an implication on reducing my hours as well as much as anything else... Childcare was a massive issue for me, and I think definitely for people who have lost that person who would help them,... I noticed that instantly."*** Female, D

***“It’s [the incident] had a massive impact on my family because before it all happened it was me, my wife and my son. We had plans... And we only had the three of us to think about. We were going to move house. We were going to do this, that and the other... And then obviously with that [incident] happening, my sister’s [victim’s] daughter, she had no one, because it was her dad that did it... So it wasn’t really a hard decision to make, but we took her into our home. So that had a massive impact on our lives completely. So that all those plans and what we were going to do, that all had to be put on the back burner. And so financially as well it affected us, there was a lot of things where it affected our lives. And I think it does to a certain extent now.”*** Male, A

### 3. Difficulties with day-to-day bills

Financial instability due to the homicide on bereaved family members was raised as an ongoing issue. Participants taking part in this study reported worry and distress related to coping with day-to-day bills in the future as they lost loved one who they relied on for a financial support.

***“I had a dad [victim] who was always there to rely on and if I was a little bit skint that week he’d fill my car up with petrol. If I said I was going to the shops he would just throw us his bank card. Not having that back up, that emergency person there is really awful, it’s scary and worrying to be honest with you because there’s nobody else. So, if a big bill comes in one day I have just got to work out how to pay that, whereas once, I would go and see my dad and he would help us.*** Female, D

***“I used to go to bed and as well as thinking about my husband [victim] and the pressure, I just used to be so distressed about how I was going to pay the Council Tax, how I was going to get food, how I was going to run the vehicle,... I might lose my house... having to pay for the logs because I’ve not been strong enough to chop the logs anymore... I’ve never felt as poorly in my life as I do now, what am I going to do when I’m an old lady, what am I going to do financially... It’s been very difficult to sell things, and trying to sell things is mentally so blocking, it’s unbelievable. It’s almost like you can’t get rid of it because it belonged to my husband.”***

Female, JU





## Impact on family, friends and colleagues

Many participants in this study described a negative impact of the crime not only on the whole family as a unit but also on individual family members. Long-term impact included:

- Lack of communication and feeling distant between family members
- Emotional and psychological impact on victim's children and on their behaviour
- Emotional and psychological impact on friends and colleagues.

### 1. Lack of communication and feeling distant between family members

The impact of the crime devastated and broke families, with many participants reporting that families became fractured and strained following the death. For many, relationships and communication between family members suffered and family members became more distant from each other.

***“You’re falling apart [family], you are so distant, nobody wants to talk to anybody. But at the same time we’re all just living in isolation I suppose, because that’s the way it is.”*** Female, S

***“Some days are harder than others but that’s not the case because you’ve come back to a family who are completely crumbling.”*** Female, AC

***“Initially it absolutely fell apart, the whole family fell apart, I come from a blended family anyway, but the whole thing fell apart. I didn’t speak to my mum for at least a year because I found her not handling things so upsetting. My husband’s family are all overseas anyway... The whole family exploded and now things are okay. We have mended a lot of things. But initially it seemed like being all on my own. I had nobody. I felt I had nobody on my side, nobody there for me.”*** Female, N

***“My mum still seems to be struggling quite a bit. Relationship with other family members it’s probably broken down a little bit. We all, kind of, moved off and grieved in different ways, we probably don’t speak as much as we used to. We’ve not fallen out, we just all went our separate ways.”*** Female, SA

In order not to get distressed or upset some bereaved avoid talking about the incident with their partners and other family members.

***“The problem is when we [with husband] talk about it [incident], we do talk about it sometimes, but when we talk about it, it is just so sad... It makes us feel so hopeless to talk about it. So, we don’t really, or we say a few words and sigh a bit.”*** Female, N

***“Me and my wife talk about it [incident], you know, every now and again, you know. We have conversations about it and we discuss it. But we try not to discuss it too much because the more you talk about it the more upset you get.”*** Male, A

***“It does get easier obviously... We’re just at a point now where it’s, of course, a lot easier to speak about. Then sometimes again a lot of grief is left or words are left unspoken because of the fear of hurting each other or rather upsetting each other.”*** Female, AC

The romantic relationships within marriages were also impacted. Many participants felt that their marriage had changed completely as a result of the incident; largely the impact

was negative, with couples feeling like they had drifted apart and no longer enjoyed themselves in the same way that they did before the death of a loved one.

***“It [incident] has changed our marriage so much. We have been through so much, that we are completely unbreakable, but in the same way, there is a lot less fun. There is so many sad feelings, sad and difficult feelings there that it does put a bit of distance between us, and you know we are okay, but we don’t have fun. We love our lives and we love each other, we adore our children, but it has just taken a lot from us.”*** Female, N

***“Well my husband and I have gone, we’re together but we do our own things, shall we say, we seem to cope with things in totally different ways so we’ve had to agree to get on with it in our own way... He [husband] went inwards and I went outwards.”*** Female, JE

## 2. Emotional and psychological impact on victim’s children and on their behaviour

Victims’ children were very much impacted. The crime had not only long lasting emotional and psychological impact but also impact on their behaviour. Participants spoke of how children became a danger to themselves and others, with one participant having to go to the police about her younger brother’s violent behaviour. Another reported that the victims’ sons had attempted suicide in the aftermath of their mother’s death.

***“The boys [victim’s sons] have both tried to take their own lives. One deep cut his wrists... Then it wasn’t long after that that [victim’s son name] took an overdose. It was just too much for them to take all in... They would never have thought about that if their mother had been here... Their sister, she went through a bad patch,... she was out with the wrong crowd. I think they should have [support from] Victim Support.”*** Female, P

***“He [younger brother] couldn’t cope. It [incident] really, really ripped him apart to be honest with you to the point where he was so evil and dangerous that we had no choice but to get the police involved because I was scared for my safety, my children’s safety. He vandalised my brother’s car, he turned up at my brother’s work threatening him, turned up at a bar where my brother was and told him he had a knife in his pocket and he was going to stab him, and it [incident] really, really affected him badly... I would have never imagined the change and anger that [brother name] carries around with him now, it’s quite scary to be honest with you how angry he is.”*** Female, D

***“I worry about my son, because he’s very quiet and he’s drunk more than he’s ever drunk since his daddy has got killed. My eldest daughter... really struggled, she’s had depression... There’s definite anxiety,... all of my grown up children suffered terribly, my daughter’s on tablets for it... It’s left us suffering mentally and the anxiety.”*** Female, JU

***“She [victim’s daughter] does have good and bad days... She’s got a lot going on regarding different aspects of her life over the last few years [since the incident]... like behaviour, attitude, aggression, anger... This [incident] had an impact on her and her schooling and her behaviour... She’s been excluded from one school... She’s still so unhappy. Things are not improving.”*** Female, AC

Even though some of the children seem to cope well, their carers worry if the crime will have an impact on them later in their lives.

***“I do worry about her [victim’s daughter]. I do worry about her because she’s taken it so, so well. She struggles with it occasionally. I see she gets upset. We talk to her about it, we’re there to help her all the time. And she’s quite strong in a way where she’s getting on with her life. She’s at uni, she’s doing really well. Just I worry there’s going to be a time later in her life where it’s going to hit her, if you see what I mean. Because I don’t think it’s fully come out of her because she was only just 16 when it happened... I know she grieves. She grieves all the time, she gets upset, she does, she really does.”*** Male, A

### 3. Emotional and psychological impact on friends and colleagues

Participants who took part in this research reported impact of the crime not only on immediate family but also victims’ neighbours, friends and even bereaved family members’ colleagues from work. This shows how extensive the impact of murder and manslaughter is; it’s not just immediate family that is effected but in some cases entire communities and workplaces. It also highlights the strains that the death can have on bereaved family members’ relationships with others, with one participant describing how people started avoiding conversations about fathers following the incident.

***“The lady next door actually found [victim’s name], she was the one who rang the police. Since then we have talked about it [incident] because she [neighbour] didn’t have any victim support or anything and we have talked it through between us and had a really good chinwag about it and we still do. Her little girl has got to go to counselling now because she has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. What happened was, her [neighbour’s] little girl came home from school that day and ran into [victim’s name] because she knew that [victim daughter’s name] would be there... So, she [neighbour daughter] ran in to play with her [victim’s daughter] so she was the one that actually found him [victim] on the floor.”*** Female, B

***“One of my managers who’d heard what had happened to me [lost son to a murder] ended up leaving because it affected him because he’s got kids as well. He left, he actually left the company that I was working at partially because of it [incident]. He couldn’t deal with that, because having to sort of deal with it, knowing it and having to probably deal with me.”*** Male, R

***“I think everyone around me has changed and not just my family but my friends as well. They tend to avoid conversations about dads, you know, things like that; they tend to shy away from talking about dads.”*** Male, ST

The research highlighted a wider range of effects. While some were immediate and short term, others increased. The change in impact will require services to reassess service users’ needs and adapt accordingly. The moments in time or developments in the external environment that have been identified can help to increase understanding of what to expect at these points and enable services to help provide support around particularly difficult times.



## Support needs of bereaved family members to cope with the impact of the crime

Apart from investigating the long-term impact of crime on bereaved family members this research looked also at participants' needs in terms of support and advice to help them cope with the effects of murder and manslaughter. Participants' responses covered support needs in the first year after the incident and a few years following the incident to capture any change.

The findings highlighted that the support required in the first year following the incident is wide-ranging and significant. Many bereaved family members expressed that they would not have been able to cope without the support provided by the VS National Homicide Service.

***"I think you are [VS National Homicide Service] the most amazing organisation ever... Without your help I don't know what would've happened to me."*** Female, S

***"The support that was put in place was as good as you could get at the time."*** Female, AC

The level of needs did however reduce over time for all participants. Bereaved family members reported that they don't need as much support as they did in the first year following the crime. Nevertheless, many participants expressed a need for support from the VS National Homicide Service over an extended period of time.

The findings yield a range of support needs from no help needed to extensive support needed several years after the incident. This study highlights recommendations for supporting bereaved family members many years after the incident happened.

Longer-term needs included:

- Support following the criminal justice process
- Sharing with people who had been through similar experience
- Follow up contact.

These themes are explored further in this chapter.

## Support following the criminal justice process

There were a number of needs that were specifically related to the longer-term. These ranged from the aftermath of the criminal justice process to having someone show care over a long period of time.

Bereaved family members who took part in this research expressed the need to be supported not only during criminal justice procedure but also after the trial has finished. They wanted to have an opportunity to look back and reflect on their emotions after the court case finished.

***“It took about a year and a half for it [case] to go to trial. And after the trial it was quite tough really to deal with it [impact of the incident].”*** Male, A

***“I don't really remember how it stopped or when it stopped [support from VS National Homicide Service], I just know it stopped abruptly. One minute there were people there and then the next minute there was no one there. I won't lie, I did actually feel alone. After it [trial] was finished, people started to drift off, everyone just disappearing and you were on your own, you've got all the information in your head and it's just going round and round; you're angry, you're upset, you don't know what to do and that's when you need someone to talk to. I feel there needs to be more support, it's because the court case had ended for that situation it doesn't mean that situation ended for the person that's involved.”*** Male, ST

***“I think you could do with just that little bit extra [emotional support] for yourself. I would think, that would be quite a good idea [to have emotional support after the court case finished]. Instead of coming to an abrupt end, sort of taper it out a little bit, just in case, because like I say when they [Homicide caseworker] have gone you don't feel like ringing up again so you just sort of cope on your own, whereas if they came back, say, after a couple of months and then left it for another couple of months and just see if you are okay, I think that might be more beneficial to people because they obviously at the time, like I say, when everybody is coming you don't have time to think about anything really until everything sort of stops.”*** Female, B

***“After the case [finished] I didn’t have any support from Victim Support [VS National Homicide Service]. That would be something that could be looked into... It’s like re-visiting the whole situation and closing it, because the case has been closed and re-visit everything and then probably close that area. It would be something that would be comforting.”*** Female, CH

***“I felt like after the compensation was paid out all [support] from Victim Support [VS National Homicide Service], I felt like... they never faulted it but they didn’t make much effort. I felt like they’ve done whatever they needed to do and that was it, finished. I kind of feel like they just thought I wanted to be helped to get the money and that was it. That wasn’t just what you need, you really need.”*** Female, D

### **Recommendation:**

- Ensuring that ongoing support is available to co-victims if needed after criminal justice process has finished.

VS National Homicide Service supports all service users at their pace and for as long as they need. The new VS Homicide Service will review their needs assessment and support plan following any criminal justice process.

## **Sharing with people who had been through similar experience**

Participants who took part in this research expressed a need to share their experience with other people who have been through the same experience, such as the Peer Support Groups currently provided by the VS National Homicide Service.

***“I think maybe groups of people that have been through the same thing... I think it’s knowing that you are not the only one going through it, you feel quite lonely, it does feel like a really lonely thing, no one understands, you know, no friends, and I think somebody who has gone through this would understand what it’s like and I think that would be just really helpful [support groups]. I think it might be a real help to actually sit down with someone, or talk to somebody who had actually gone through it.”*** Female, D

***“Maybe [support] groups with people that are going through the same situations. You learn from experience.”*** Male, R

***“I think there needs to be kind of more connection with people. I feel quite lonely. But I think if I knew somebody else, meeting other people that had been through a similar thing... It’s nice to know that there are other people that are like you.”*** Female, S

***“You need someone to talk to that’s been in a situation as similar to yours as possible, like support groups. Someone that understands you or understands the situation that you’ve been in; this is more helpful than someone who doesn’t. Having someone there that can listen but also understands emotionally. It’s having that connection with someone... You can relate to their situation, they can relate to yours; you can emotionally help each other because you can both connect on a deeper level.”*** Male, ST



Bereaved family members would prefer to attend peer support groups not shortly after the incident happened but at a later time.

***“I don’t think as soon as possible [to offer support groups] works in my opinion, I just didn’t feel ready to really talk back then. I felt quite private about it [incident] when it first happened and after that I felt like it was something that I needed to speak to my family about, and friends.”*** Female, D

***“I would say a year [to offer peer support groups] because then the dust’s settled, you begin to sort of like settle down and all your emotions really kick in I think because you’ve gone through all the turmoil of the trial and everything else and you’re tensed up for it. I mean when that finishes it’s over and you’ve got to cope with what you’ve got to deal with.”*** Female, JE

Bereaved family members who went to an ‘Escaping Victimhood’ residential workshop and took part in the support groups and workshops found it very helpful in coping with the impact of the incident. This intervention was found particularly useful when it was offered after the trial finished as they could reflect on everything what happened.



***“I also went to, Victimhood, I went away for four days... and there were twenty other people in there that had been through a similar sort of thing that I’ve been through... And you sit down, you chat to each other and you do these workshops and you do painting and it was absolutely fantastic. That helped me quite a lot, talking to other people, that’s not directly involved in your own situation... And I think those were probably the most important times, when it’s [trial] completely over. You have time to reflect on everything and I think that’s probably one of the most important points of anyone’s like to go through this sort of thing, they probably need that support because it’s all over.”*** Male, A

***“I did also go on the Escaping Victimhood week which really changed my life. That really, I mean, I don’t know what I would’ve done if I’d not gone on that... That was the best thing that happened to me and I came back different. I think if it could be repeated maybe, if there was a way of involving Escaping Victimhood but at a later stage... It was very, very, very traumatic time. I think if I could do... the Escaping Victimhood week or programme later on, so that people are not in that traumatic state and they’re able to reflect more about what’s happening in hindsight and look back.”*** Female, S



## Recommendation:

- Ensuring that peer support groups are available across England and Wales and offer peer support in a range of ways to co-victims.

VS National Homicide Service introduced a new Peer Support Team who will provide peer support. In addition, the VS National Homicide Service has a comprehensive peer support network where service users can share knowledge, emotional assistance and practical help with others who have been bereaved through murder or manslaughter. Peer support can be accessed in two ways: a secure online portal or through face-to-face group meetings.

- *Secure online peer support forum called The Support Room*

The Support Room is an online chat room where participants share support, information and reassurance with those who have been similarly bereaved. The VS National Homicide Service also provides information on key topics chosen by users of The Support Room to help them cope with trauma and bereavement. As well as restricting access to only those who are co-victims, the service moderates the Support Room 24/7 to make sure it is a safe place for support.

- *Group meetings*

The VS National Homicide Service is developing a network of meetings where service users can meet those with similar experience across England and Wales. These meetings, supported by staff and Peer Supporters, cover key topics chosen by participants to help them cope with their bereavement. They also offer an opportunity to build friendships and support networks.

## Follow up contact

Many participants in this study expressed the need for a phone call from VS National Homicide Service caseworkers every six months, regardless of how long ago the incident happened, so they know that they are not alone, and support is there if needed. Some family members also would welcome the ability to make contact at any point they feel they need someone to talk to in the future.

***“I think the support should go on for longer just because if somebody from Victim Support rang me tomorrow I would probably say something very different to what I would have said the year before. They [VS National Homicide Service] do need a follow-up. I guess... for me probably once every six months [to give a phone call], because little questions do crop up or, you know, things that you live with or you wonder about.”*** Female, N

***“Maybe every six months a phone call checking to see if everything is okay. That’s really nice, like five minutes [to talk]... Or if I had a phone number that I could call when circumstances had changed.”*** Female, J

***“Just having somebody to talk to, even a phone call, you know, having a phone number that you could perhaps phone in and say, ‘I’m having a terrible time at the moment’... Every now and again, just a bit of reassurance to know that there’s somebody there perhaps that you can talk to, just occasionally. Once every six months, or every few months just to say we’re here if you need to phone us, here’s our phone number, give us a ring.”*** Female, C

***“Most important, follow up. Even if it’s only a phone call six months later to say, look, are you dealing with it? That would be nice, because you are not forgotten... I just think it’s that important phone call, once in a while, just see how people are coping.”*** Female, P

***“It would’ve been [good] to have known that there is somebody there if you need them or even if somebody had contacted me [from VS National Homicide Service], I would really welcome that actually. Or even if it’s just a random email, say six months to a year even. I think once a year is probably okay.”*** Female, S

***“Be it only a conversation or a word at the end of the phone or to be able to contact them [VS National Homicide Service] on a bad day. It’s able to turn around and know that it doesn’t matter if it’s two, three, four, five, six years down the line and knowing that there’s not a full stop [to occasional support]. This is such a good idea to come back to people after so many years to find out [if they need further support].”***  
Female, AC



### **Recommendation:**

- Ensuring that support services are accessible to all co-victims at any point they feel they need someone to talk to in the future.

Former service users can re-enter the service at any time themselves by contacting and referring themselves to the VS National Homicide Service or through the two peer support routes.

Where service users would like to keep in touch, the VS National Homicide Service will refer co-victims to online peer support where trained Peer Supporters are available to offer them support, and peer support networks can be accessed to enable them to continue to build a support network.

## **Moving on**

Nevertheless, some participants in this study reported no need for further support. Others were afraid to accept any further support and stated that as they don't know how to deal with the impact of the crime they just ignore it and prefer not to deal with it.

*“At this stage in my life, me personally, and my family we’ve got to a point where really we’re okay. We know where we are. So I wouldn’t want to, it’s probably not the right thing to say, but I wouldn’t want to step backwards. We have to look forwards, if you see what I mean. So to have any help [now], the impact would be a step back for me.”* Male, A

*“I think if too much was offered, I think it would be a reminder of the actual incident too much as well. I think you’d be thinking too much about what had happened, I’m not going to ever forget it, but it’s locked away somewhere. I do have memories and flashbacks, reminders, I have reminders that take me there and I try to come out of it. But I think if you had too much [support], I think it would be going backwards.”* Female, C

*“I think my mum got that support [from VS National Homicide Service] for a lot longer, and I think she became a little bit reliant on it. Whereas I got myself back to work, and I started living a normal life much quicker than my mum, because she always had that support, and I think she relied on it, probably, a little bit too much.”* Female, SA

*“I don’t think I’d know how to deal with it [impact of the incident] now to be honest with you. ‘Don’t open up a can of worms’; that’s how I feel about it. If I go back to then, you know, I’m going to be back in the same situation again, I’m going to be back hurting again. It’s pretty hard to even just talk about it [incident] still, it’s still very tender. I know a lot of people have said to me at some point or another, it’s going to hit home again and it’s going to do a lot of damage when it does but I’d rather live in ignorance. I think I’m at that point where I don’t know how to deal with it so I’d rather not deal with it.”* Male, ST



## Summary of findings and conclusion

The long-term impact of murder and manslaughter on those left behind is significant and many bereaved family members suffer emotionally and psychologically for many years after the incident. For some their need for support remains long after the death, and their support requirements change over time. Our research found:

- Many bereaved family members by murder and manslaughter experience emotional and psychological effects of the crime several years after the incident
- Bereaved family members reported increase in anger and aggression over the time
- Many bereaved feel persistent anxiety and are fearful of violence and for their and their family safety
- Some bereaved family members reported being more protective and strict with their children
- All bereaved family members participating in this study reported viewing themselves as permanently changed with no hope of life returning to how it was before the incident
- Many participants reported that they will grieve for the rest of their life
- A large number of bereaved family members also reported long-term negative impact on their physical health such as developing acute pain or change in cognitive function

- Although for many bereaved family members insomnia, nightmares and flashbacks become less severe over the years, some still suffer from insomnia and occasional flashbacks few years after the incident
- Some bereaved family members also reported drink and antidepressants dependency
- The majority of bereaved family members reported a change in their feelings and behaviour towards other people. They trust people less and become more isolated
- Many bereaved were faced with practical implications such as responsibilities for taking over caring duties of other family members
- The loss of their loved one through homicide had long-term impact on bereaved family members' financial situation as many of them had to give up work or started working part-time
- Many bereaved also reported financial impact due to the childcare and as a result of becoming a guardian to victim's children
- A large number of bereaved family members reported emotional and psychological impact on victim's children and on their behaviour
- Many bereaved reported a lack of communication and feeling distant between family members
- The negative impact of the crime can go beyond immediate family and may affect emotionally and psychologically victims' close friends, extended family as well as bereaved family members' colleagues from work
- Three themes have been identified as long-term needs of bereaved family members and possible support to cope with negative long-effect of the crime. Building on this knowledge, recommendations and need for incorporating of additional services by VS National Homicide Service has been recognised:
  - **Support following the criminal justice process** – Ensuring that ongoing support is available to co-victims if needed after the criminal justice process has finished
  - **Sharing with people who had been through similar experience** – Ensuring that peer support groups are available across England and Wales and offer peer support in a range of ways to co-victims
  - **Follow up contact** – Ensuring that support services are accessible to all co-victims at any point they feel they need someone to talk to in the future.

Findings from this research demonstrate that murder and manslaughter of a loved one completely changed the lives of participants who took part in this study as well as other members of victims' families and their close friends. The bereaved family members struggled to cope with the impact of the incident in the immediate aftermath of the crime and although their problems improved many of them are still emotionally impacted and need further support. Many bereaved family members reported that their problems may become more profound around significant dates such as the victims' birthday, Christmas, the date of victim's death, trial dates or the release of the perpetrator.

Although bereaved family members reported that they don't need as much support as they did in the first year following the crime, findings from this study highlight the importance of long-term support for an extended period of time. Help and support should be tailored to the needs of individuals. The findings from this study shows that bereaved family members need some form of aftercare, even years after the incident.



To ensure victim support services are effective it is vital that they are evidence-based. Research into victimisation is essential to enhance understanding of how people are impacted short- and long-term by crime and what support they require to move beyond the crime. This study adds to the understanding of the long-term needs of bereaved family members. The literature on the long-term needs, support and services that would help bereaved family members to cope with the impact of the crime is still very much limited and additional evidence is crucial.

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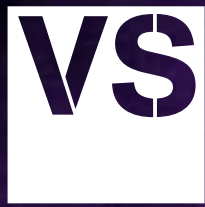


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***“It does get easier obviously... We’re just at a point now where it’s, of course, a lot easier to speak about. Then sometimes again a lot of grief is left or words are left unspoken because of the fear of hurting each other or rather upsetting each other.”***

Female, AC



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Victim Support, 1 Bridge Street, Derby DE1 3HZ  
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