

The Facts About Homicide

In 2010, an estimated 14,748 persons were murdered nationwide—one every 36 minutes.¹

In 2010, 77 percent of murder victims were male and 23 percent were female.²

In 2010, for homicides in which the type of weapon was specified, 68 percent were committed with firearms.³

In 2010, when the age and sex of the perpetrator were known, homicide offenders were most often males (ratio of 10 to 1) and adults (ratio of 9 to 1).⁴

In 2010, 32 percent of homicide victims were white, 38 percent were black, and 30 percent were classified as “other” or “unknown.”⁵

In 2010, when the race of the victim and offender was known, homicide was generally intraracial: white offenders murdered 82 percent of white victims, and black offenders murdered 96 percent of black victims.⁶

ENDNOTES

¹Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011, *Crime in the United States, 2010*, Washington, DC.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Resources for Information and Assistance

Directory of Crime Victim Services
Office for Victims of Crime
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
<http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices>

National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children
1-888-818-POMC or 1-888-818-7662
www.pomc.com

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
1-800-GET-MADD or 1-800-438-6233
www.madd.org

National Center for Victims of Crime
202-467-8700
www.ncvc.org

The Compassionate Friends
1-877-969-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

Concerns of Police Survivors
1-800-784-2677
www.nationalcops.org

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Office for Victims of Crime
OVC

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

OVC HELP SERIES for Crime Victims

Homicide

What Is Homicide?

Homicide is the willful, intentional killing of one human being by another, including murder, manslaughter, and vehicular homicide. Survivors of homicide victims, also called co-victims, are generally defined as the family members, friends, and other loved ones of the victim. They feel the life-changing impact of the trauma, hardship, and loss that result from the crime.

What To Expect as a Co-Victim or Survivor of Homicide

The violent, unexpected death of a family member, intimate partner, or close friend is one of the most traumatic experiences a person can face, and it prompts a wide range of emotional reactions. Co-victims also may find that the “normal” grief of losing a loved one is further complicated by the trauma or stigma of the crime.

There is no right or wrong way to feel when someone close to you is murdered. You may feel overcome with disbelief, anger, and sadness with an intensity never experienced before, or you may feel emotionally numb. It is normal for adults and children to experience such intense feelings in the days and weeks following a homicide, and then periodically over time. Survivors are at risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other problems, where extreme anxiety, fear, and sadness or nightmares and intrusive thoughts remain constant for weeks or months. Additional support and counseling are often very helpful in managing these overwhelming emotions.

Many families must contend with financial issues as a result of the crime. You and your family may need to quickly plan and pay for a funeral and cope with the loss of income resulting from the death of the family’s primary wage earner. Each state administers a victim compensation program that may provide you with financial reimbursement for expenses such as funeral and burial costs, counseling expenses, and

lost wages. It is important to keep receipts and records for these and other out-of-pocket costs related to the homicide. Victim assistance programs in your community can provide information about your state’s crime victim compensation program.

The investigation and criminal justice process following a homicide may be confusing and traumatic for co-victims. Family and friends may have many questions about the manner in which their loved one died. It is often important for you and your family members to remain in contact with the investigators and the victim assistance professionals assigned to the case in order to receive periodic updates about the investigation and court hearings, if there is an arrest.

Family members and friends often feel that they have little control over the criminal justice process or results. Investigations do not always lead to an arrest, arrests do not always end in prosecution, prosecutions do not always end in convictions, and convictions do not always lead to stiff sentences. If there is an arrest, the length of time from arrest to final disposition varies from case to case. Court rules and continuances can be very frustrating. It is important to remember that most states guarantee certain fundamental rights for crime victims, and you may feel empowered by the opportunity to exercise your rights throughout the criminal justice process. Your local victim assistance program and the organizations listed below can provide more information about your rights as a co-victim.

Also note that it is not uncommon to feel re-victimized by the media immediately following the crime or throughout the criminal justice process. The media may report inaccurate information, portray the victim in a negative light, or not report the crime at all. Victim assistance professionals or investigators can suggest ways for you to deal with such media issues.

Most co-victims feel that they are forever changed by the homicide. However, like many other survivors, you may discover untapped reserves of resourcefulness and

resilience that enable you to cope successfully in the aftermath of a tragic personal loss.

Where Can You Get Help?

Resources are available in most communities to help family members and friends cope after the death of a loved one due to homicide. It is particularly helpful to contact a victim assistance professional or a victim advocate as soon as possible after being notified that your loved one has been murdered. Victim assistance professionals are often located within your local police department, prosecutor’s office, state attorney general’s office, or the U.S. Attorney’s Office. These professionals can help connect you to the investigators working on the case, provide information about crime victims’ compensation and other victims’ rights, and explain what to expect during various stages of the criminal justice process. They can also provide referrals for other services that may be helpful to you and your family in the aftermath of the crime.

You may also want to seek the support and understanding of others who have gone through similar experiences. Many survivors report that a homicide support group, or just talking one-on-one with a person who has had a loved one murdered, helps them in their grieving process. These groups can help you realize that you are not alone and that others have experienced similar tragedies and survived.

It may be helpful to speak one-on-one with a counselor or therapist who understands the trauma and complicated bereavement that follows a homicide. Many adults and children benefit from individual counseling, particularly if overwhelming feelings persist over a prolonged period.

While at times you may feel very isolated as you try to cope with an event that is far outside the scope of so-called normal, everyday life, it is important to know that many types of assistance are available to you. You are not alone.