

What are the facts about homicide?



- There were an estimated 15,533 homicides during 1999 throughout the United States. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- Firearms were used in 7 out of 10 homicides during 1999. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- Arguments were the cause of 30 percent of homicides in 1999, whereas 17 percent happened in conjunction with another crime, such as robbery or arson. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- In 1999, 76 percent of murder victims were male, and males constituted 90 percent of those who committed murder in cases in which gender was reported. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- In 1999, 48 percent of all murder victims knew their assailants: 14 percent were related to the offenders, and 34 percent were acquainted with them. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- Murder is most often intraracial. Data based on incidents involving one victim and one offender show that in 1999, 94 percent of black murder victims were killed by black offenders and 85 percent of white murder victims were killed by white offenders. (*Crime in the United States 1999*. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000)
- In the United States, homicide causes 20 percent of all deaths among youth and young adults ages 10 to 24. (*MMWR-CDC Surveillance Summaries: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States 1997*, 47(55-3). Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998)

- Since the mid-1980s the rate of murder committed by youth has doubled, increasing by 102 percent. (*State Legislative Responses to Violent Juvenile Crime: 1996-97 Update*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1998)

Resources for Information and Assistance

The Compassionate Friends

630-990-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

Concerns of Police Survivors

1-800-784-2677

www.nationalcops.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

1-800-GET-MADD or 1-800-438-6233

www.madd.org

National Center for Victims of Crime

1-800-FYI-CALL or 1-800-394-2255

www.ncvc.org

The National Coalition of Homicide Survivors, Inc.

520-740-5729

www.mivictims.org/NCHS

National Organization for Victim Assistance

1-800-TRY-NOVA or 1-800-879-6682

www.try-nova.org

National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children

1-888-818-POMC or 1-888-818-7662

www.pomc.com

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center

1-800-627-6872

TTY 1-877-712-9279

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

This brochure was developed by the National Center for Victims of Crime under a project supported by Grant No. 97-VF-GX-K007 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



Homicide Covictimization

Office for Victims of Crime
OVC
Advocating for the Fair
Treatment of Crime Victims

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

What is homicide?

Homicide is generally defined as the willful, intentional killing of one human being by another. There are different types of homicide, including murder and manslaughter. People from all walks of life and all types of backgrounds can be victims of homicide. Family members and significant others become covictims when their loved one is murdered.

The violent death of a family member, intimate partner, or close friend is one of the most traumatic experiences you could ever face. It is an event for which no one can adequately prepare but that results in a wide range of emotional pain and upheaval. Everyone close to the victim will grieve in different ways. In addition, the sudden and unnatural manner of death presents feelings and emotions that compound those caused by your grief.

As a homicide covictim, you may experience many kinds of loss. You may feel a loss of self or feel changed from the person you used to be. You may feel that you have lost control of your life and your sense of safety and security. You may question your faith or religion.

When covictims first learn about the homicide, many experience shock and disbelief, numbness, changes in appetite or sleeping patterns, difficulty concentrating, confusion, anger, fear, and worry. It is hard to understand how others are able to go on with their daily routine. For a long time, the emotional and physical suffering may seem to use up all the energy you have. Even though you knew before the murder that bad things happen, you may have thought they only happened to other people, so you did not feel vulnerable to crime. Now, you have a new sense of vulnerability for yourself and others.



If You Are a Homicide Covictim

A homicide is almost always violent. The knowledge that your loved one experienced an intentional death can be traumatic and will cause grief. The death that took your loved one probably feels unlike any other loss you have experienced. You may feel vast swings in emotion. You may feel guilty for not being able to protect your loved one, even if you know that was impossible. Even many years after a murder, covictims may find themselves suddenly crying over their loss. Such experiences are called trauma and grief “spasms.” Certain events, such as birthdays or anniversaries, may trigger this kind of grief.

Your involvement with the criminal justice system may complicate your grief. Often, homicide covictims are depersonalized throughout the criminal process. Through the police investigation, you may hear for the first time certain details about your loved one that can be confusing and sometimes hurtful. Inaccurate or inappropriate information about your loved one may come out in court or in the media. In addition, court rules and continuances can be very frustrating. Covictims find that arrests do not always end in prosecution, prosecutions do not always end in convictions, and convictions do not always mean stiff sentences. If the murderer is never arrested, your grief process may be even more difficult.

Remember, each person deals with tragedy in his or her own way. At times, you may feel depressed or hopeless and lack interest in things you once enjoyed. Emotions may come and go or overwhelm you. Know that intense feelings are normal. What you feel is what you need to feel moment by moment. Covictims are forever changed by homicide. Life will never be the same for you and your family, but many homicide covictims find that with time, they can face life with new understanding and new meaning.



Where can you get help?

Information is crucial for you to deal with this overwhelming event in your life. Your community has resources to help you better understand your reactions and experiences. You and your family might want to seek the support and understanding of others who have gone through similar trauma. Many covictims say that attending a homicide support group, though sometimes difficult, helped them in their grieving process. These support groups can help you realize that you are not alone and that others experience and survive the same depth and complexity of emotions and frustrations.

Call on victim assistance programs in your community or seek out counselors who understand the grief that follows traumatic death. Counselors can provide you with information and a full range of victim support services and assist you through the criminal justice process. Social services program personnel and other trained professionals also can help you find out about crime victim rights in your state.

When a loved one has been killed, the financial impact can be a second victimization. Homicide may mean a loss of income for your family. If the victim survived briefly before death, there may be large medical bills to pay. Funeral expenses can be a burden. All states now have crime victim compensation programs that reimburse victims’ families for certain out-of-pocket expenses, including funeral expenses, medical expenses, counseling, and other financial needs considered reasonable. Contact your state’s victim compensation program or your local victim assistance program to discuss eligibility requirements.