Homicide co-victims: confidence in the criminal justice system

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address the phenomenology of family members of homicide victims; known as "co-victims". In particular, co-victims experiences of the criminal justice system (CJS) in England and Wales.

Design/methodology/approach – In 2018, 10 kV methodology facilitated an electronic-focus group. Anonymously, volunteers from families of homicide victims responded to key questions in a session entitled "a conversation which matters: confidence". The thematic analysis presents the responses to three questions around "what works" and "what does not" in CJS practice.

Findings – The responses indicate four themes in relation to confidence building: communication and information; outcome; honesty and fairness; and family support. Responses indicate three themes in relation to what the CJS does well: family liaison officers, homicide detectives and court services. Responses indicate three themes in relation to what is not working: court proceedings, police budget cuts and preventative interventions.

Research limitations/implications – The research considers benefits and limitations of methodology and makes suggestions for how these facets could be addressed by future research.

Practical implications – The research findings reveal good practice and points for attention to support confidence building in the CJS. Amongst other considerations, the work advances CJS practical good practice principles from the perspective of co-victims: education, interpersonal relations, working together, communication and justice.

Originality/value – Findings are of value to CJS policy makers, training and education for co-victim support, police and academics.

Keywords Homicide, Family, Confidence, Murder, Good practice, Criminal justice system, Attention points, Co-victims

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

It is difficult to understand how it must feel to open the door to a police officer who is there to tell you that your loved one has been killed at the hands of another. What we can try to understand, with the help of co-victims, is how the subsequent criminal justice system (CJS) investigation feels for those suffering in this way, and how the system can be improved to assist them in encountering processes. The crime of homicide is well established as a research focus, however consideration of co-victims has received comparatively less attention. Co-victims experience a "unique synergy" of loss and psychological trauma, often over extended periods of time engaged with the CJS. Co-victims are a population of victims who have been "hidden" from research focus for too long (Armour, 2002). A literature review will frame the context of co-victim research. This begins to highlight the limitations and ambiguity in the literature over exactly "what" and "who" co-victims are. The paper puts forward a paradigm for understanding "types" of co-victims as "primary" or "secondary". By contextualising research conducted in the UK comparatively with that of American data, it becomes apparent that research at a global level is sparse. In contemporary England and Wales, instances of homicide have increased yearly, and as a consequence so have the number of co-victims. It is important that criminological research investigates the effectiveness of CJS interventions and policy from the perspective of co-victims (because the effect of interventions could either improve or worsen the situation for them). The methodology in this paper describes a novel approach to data gathering through 10 kV electronic debriefing. The analysis seeks to explore the experiences of co-victims' perception of the CJS, the findings and discussion are presented concurrently. The aim is twofold: first, to give a voice to co-victims' experiences of the CJS in England and Wales; and second, to highlight good practice and points for attention. The work will conclude with a summary of the key findings and recommendations for research, theory and practice.

Brief literature review: co-victims of homicide

The meaning of "co-victim" of homicide is ambiguous in the literature. There are two positions. The "traditional" approach suggests the label should be limited to family connections; "co-victims, also known as survivors of homicide, are individuals who have familial connections with the victim and are thus indirectly victimised, first by losing a loved one and afterward by the conditions attendant to the murder" (Connolly and Gordon, 2014, p. 494; MacVane et al., 2003). A "non-traditional" approach considers the title of "co-victim" applying to broader social relationships with the victim: "the number of victims, when co-victims are included rises exponentially depending on how many family members or close friends are affected" (Armour, 2002, p.109). This analysis will take the position of "traditional", as the data presents perspectives of family members. As co-victims are not included in crime statistics exact numbers are difficult to ascertain (Amour, 2002; Sprang et al., 1989). Estimates of co-victims vary, with an estimated seven to ten people traditional co-victims per homicide (Redmond, 1989). Other sources suggest 9.3 per cent of adults (Amick-McMullan et al., 1991), and 8 per cent of children identify as traditional or nontraditional co-victims (Turner et al., 2018). Demographics of traditional co-victims in England and Wales were attained through the Homicide Service, which provides support to bereaved families. From 292 homicide cases, co-victims totalled 732 individuals, within 520 households (Casey, 2011). The data also indicate "who" the co-victims are: the parents of the deceased represented the highest proportion (29 per cent), followed by children of the deceased (22 per cent), siblings (19 per cent) and partners/ex-partners (14 per cent) (Casey, 2011). Literature on co-victims tends to focus on the psychological impact of coping with grief, trauma and bereavement from a clinical perspective. Other dynamics considered have been the social, occupational and familial effects of homicide on co-victims. A literature review revealed 40 articles addressing the effects of homicide on co-victims, although the data were predominantly gathered in the USA. Only two articles

referred to England and Wales (Connolly and Gordon, 2014). Of the 40 articles identified globally, five considered the impact of the CJS on participants in America (Adkins, 2003; Kasha and Beard, 1999; Dannemiller, 2002; Thompson et al., 1996; King, 2004). It is important to recognise recent developments in America, which emphasises the significance of better understanding the co-victims and CJS (Englebrecht et al., 2014, 2016; Vincent et al., 2015; Mastrocinque et al., 2015; Reed et al., 2019). Equally, data from England and Wales have produced recent contributions to understanding covictims' experiences of CJS (Casey, 2011; Gekoski et al., 2013; Alves-Costa et al., 2018). However, posthomicide remains an under researched area generally. As a consequence, there are limitations in our knowledge of "what works" for co-victims in CJS. Research has called for improved communication and promotion of understanding between co-victims and the CJS and supporting rights and understanding of the legal process (Gekoski et al., 2013). This work seeks to identify intervention processes which work, and those which do not, from the perspective of co-victims. Homicide creates a distinctly different experience for co-victims, compared to coping with other forms of death caused by sickness, suicide or death without deliberate intent (Rando, 1996). Homicide is an extreme of violent crime, defined by criminal law as murder, manslaughter and infanticide. Homicide reported to police constabularies by regions in England and Wales indicate the prevalence rates geographically and illustrates that all regions suffer the impact of homicide on both CJS resources and the need for co-victim support (ONS, 2019b), Home Office data show police recorded homicide offences in 2017/2018 have increased by 14 per cent from 649 to 739 (ONS, 2019a). It represents the highest reported number of homicides in England and Wales since 2007. A large proportion of these being carried out by a sharp instrument (House of Commons, 2018). The number of fatal stabbings in England and Wales in 2017/2018 was the highest since records began in 1946 (ONS, 2019c). Contemporary statistics on homicide place the problem firmly in the minds of: the public, victims, CJS professionals and health care workers. Chief Constable Bill Skelly (National Police Chiefs' Council) said crime statistics increases could be due to recording practices by police or increased reporting of offences by the public. However, he emphasised there are "real rises in serious crimes […] with a devastating impact on victims and families" (BBC, 2019). This means, there are more and more co-victims of homicide experiencing criminal justice procedures; and, increasing concerns over how to effectively build confidence in the CJS.

Design, method and analysis

Design 10 kV methodological design offers a rare and valuable opportunity for the views and experiences of co-victims of homicide to have their voice heard in the company of CJS, police and victim support personnel. 10 kV is a design of the Hydra Foundation, which is a research community supporting 85 Hydra international centres worldwide. The foundation provides Hydra critical incident simulations and 10 kV methodology for Police, Social Care, Fire and other life-saving organisations and provides the methodologies to the UK Fire and Police free of charge. 10 kV was commissioned at the request of the Association of Chief Police Officers as a means of debriefing police or other public organisations in relation to critical incidents, so that agencies could learn from one another in relation to relatively rare "once-in-a-career" experiences. A critical incident is defined as "any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community." (College of Policing, 2013). Early use of the technology included debriefs after the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman (in 2002), and the London bombings (2005). In practice, 10 kV functions like an electronic-focus group, where individuals in the debriefing discuss a particular topic (e.g. in this case participants respond to questions around "confidence in the CJS"). Each person inputs their statements in response anonymously and simultaneously and can respond in real time to other's comments. 10 kV is a novel and important research design. The College of Policing have emphasised decision making and technology enhanced

learning as a core focus in training and education for police. There are a number of benefits associated with an anonymous electronic debriefing methodology. For example, the method facilitates an open-ended approach to data gathering, the data gathering process is driven by the participants and not the researchers, the model allows participants discuss their experiences with others who are in the same position (typically, data gathering of such sensitive nature is attained through individual rather than group participation) and the electronic nature allows participants to build and develop on others narratives, and perhaps become aware of perspectives they may not have initially thought of. Alison and Crego (2008) also recognise broader benefits: participants can express their views without consequence, the effects of interpersonal differences are mitigated, the platform encourages introverted participants to express their "voice", the design permits the generation of vast amounts of rich data in a short space of time and 10 kV removes the potential for deference in relation to power dynamics. Researchers wishing to develop 10 kV based research should also be aware of the potential limitations of the method. Driven by a paradigm of pragmatism (rather than empiricism), the end goals precede over theory building. The purpose of the research is not "traditional" experimentation, but to explore challenges and potential solutions for subject populations. Therefore in terms of scientific rigour there are limitations. For example, Alison et al. (2013) have recognised: the intricate complexity of the data generated and difficulty with outcome measures, and the scientific rigour complications associated with confounding variables, reduced experimental control, reliability and validity in relation to non-statistical findings. However, it has been suggested that criticism related to scientific rigour can be overcome by maintaining four operational principles: objectivity, reproducibility, plausibility and generalisability (Alison et al., 2013). It has been argued that reliability and generalisability should not be the central concern of qualitative researchers', instead the precision and the integrity of their findings more significant. The idea of discovering knowledge through measures of reliability and validity is replaced by the idea of trustworthiness (Mishler, 2000), which is "defensible" (Johnson, 1997, p. 282). Furthermore, the potential for group think must be acknowledged in relation to the potential for conformity or compliance with dominant responses.

Participants

A large Metropolitan police force in England and Wales engaged with a court to gain agreement for the 10 kV debriefing session to be delivered in the court building with six judges in attendance. The session took place in the evening (19:00 to 22:00), in January 2018, with 32 families participating. The participants were contacted by the police and volunteered anonymously. The participants were notified that their input would be used for dissemination in order to develop good practice and points for attention. Also, in attendance were: Senior Police Officers, Police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs), Court Witness Support Services and the Victims' Commissioner. Only the co-victim participants entered data into the electronic-focus group.

Procedure

The evening was divided into two "sessions". In the first, co-victims were asked to respond to the question "what matters to me?" The "what matters" section is designed to ensure that the discussion is driven by the delegates. The objective is to avoid research bias or the restriction of issues important to the delegates. The second session asked co-victims specific questions related to the topic "a conversation that matters: confidence". Data gathered in the second session is the focus of the current analysis, which considers responses in relation to confidence in the CJS, what works and what could be improved. The questions were designed to enable attendees to provide anonymous comments and raise any number of issues that were important to them, reflecting on their own experiences related to confidence in the CJS. Using 10 kV, all comments, once submitted, were displayed to all participants electronically. This enabled participant to review what had been written by others and add their

perspective. The facilitator (author) "cross-examined" the comments verbally, this allowed participants to add to the narrative electronically in relation the issues or ambiguities point out by the facilitator. The objectives were to widen the debate around the responses to ensure that no single interpretation or the significance of any issue was accepted as universal.

Method of analysis

After the event, the electronic responses to eight questions were saved and printed out into paper form. The responses were already categorised as responses to the questions. The total data set for session two contains 5,933 words entered into 10 kV in 182 separate comments in response to eight questions. As a result of space restrictions this analysis presents findings from three questions (which received the highest number of responses). The total number of words included in the current analysis is 3,016 in 98 separate comments. Thematic content analysis was applied to the qualitative responses to each of the three questions the following analysis will present. Thematic analysis allows representation of phenomenology of the lived experience of individuals. Thematic analysis is beneficial, particularly here, as it is independent of theory and epistemological position. This allows for the benefit of unanticipated incites. Thematic analysis is also useful in the current context because it permits comparison between participant's phenomenology to gage how many people held the same views of the significant of the themes which emerged. The method is flexible and can be utilised in order to examine a broad array of subject issues. For a full discussion of thematic analysis as an analytical approach see Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was achieved in line with the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006). There was an initial phase of familiarisation with data (as it related to each of the three questions), generating codes for comment and grouping the codes in line with what the participant expressed as significant (e.g. communication, justice, jurors, etc.). Comments which related to the broad themes which emerged from the data where then grouped together to present the findings, so there was a processes of revising and reviewing the themes. Finally, there was the naming of themes and their descriptive clusters. This allowed the presentation of the prevalence rate of themes (i.e., how many comments related to each of the themes). Themes are presented here as three or more participant comments which related to the grouping topic. This acts to increase the validity and reliability of consensus. The findings are a descriptively, seeking to depict that which exists within a participant groups' social reality. Descriptive studies do not strive to measure the effect of a variable; only to describe the phenomena, event or interaction. Description can be used to refer to behaviours, thoughts and observations of the participant's experiences. "It is a process of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 145).

Findings

Findings relating to three questions are reported below.

What do we do that builds confidence? (24 comments in total)

Communication and information (9 comments). Communication and information was central to perceived confidence building. The co-victims pointed to the importance of frequent updates and regular feedback:

> Keeping us in the loop, letting us know exactly what is going on.

Co-victims emphasised the key role of information particularly in relation to police interaction:

Regular feedback is an essential tool for the police.

Communicating and educating on the challenges of the investigation and prosecuting the accused were considered significant. It was noted that information sharing with other agencies and authorities in order to avoid confusion or repetition builds confidence. The importance of communicating information about the investigative processes in a style that was transparent and translated into layman's terms (as opposed to "legal jargon"), and increased understanding of court proceedings was emphasised.

Honesty and fairness (5 comments). Honesty and fairness built confidence for families, and absence of such was seen as damaging. Several comments emphasised integrity of information and guarding against making promises:

> Open and honest. It's an emotional time but the one thing you want is honesty. Don't give false hope.

Honesty was emphasised, along with listening to the concerns of co-victims, by some:

> Listening to our concerns. Not making promises that can't be kept.

There was the perspective that honestly irrespective of whether the information is positive or negative is central to confidence building. Others commented on the necessity of impartiality and not victimising co-victims through judgemental approaches to interactions:

> To build confidence, the police need to be honest throughout investigations. Officers need to remain impartial and non-judgemental. A victim requires a fair trial in all instances.

The outcome of CJS proceedings (6 comments). The outcome of the CJS proceedings is central to perceived confidence. The comments here were relatively consistent in semantic meaning, emphasising justice being served, arresting and successfully convicting criminals. For example:

> The police provide a public service. Arresting and convicting criminals builds confidence in the police and criminal justice system as a whole.

Simply put:

> Convict the convict.

Others emphasised the dedication of staff, but how resource restriction on the CJS prevents them from delivering the desired outcome at the trial, for example:

> You have dedicated, committed staff that are driven by desire to get the right result but resources prevent this happening.

Support and protection (4 comments). Supporting the co-victims through interpersonal contact and protection was felt to be important to confidence building. Employing measures to ensure the safety of the family; and safety of the community to report crimes or act as witnesses in court was emphasised:

> [...] person's protection is needed from the police or the justice system; most individuals are afraid to come out by reporting crimes or given evidence in fear of their lives.

Where co-victims had prior contact with police before the murder, there can be the perception that the CJS has failed the family before the investigation has begun.

What do we do well? (31 comments in total)

Family liaison officers (17 comments). FLOs were the most commented on theme by co-victims. The families participating were extremely positive about the role of an FLO and the importance of the support. For example:

> Family liaisons are a must; absolutely fantastic, keep it all together.

There was a perception of consensus on the positive role of an FLO:

> Generally most families we speak with have a positive experience with police FLOs.

FLOs were explained to be helpful support assisted the difficulty of the investigation:

> Experience with my FLO made the whole journey much easier for me.

The FLOs were recognised as central to assist information flow, as encapsulated by this comment:

> A very priceless connection between victims and information.

In total, there were 17 positive comments made regarding FLOs. These covered a range of topics including: relationship building, ongoing empathy, compassion, sensitivity and acknowledgement of the difficult role FLO's manage, etc.

The comments also discussed continued contact with the FLO after the trail, for example:

> There for us during and after and we still have a good relationship with our officers. […] we have not been forgotten.

Furthermore, co-victims expressed the desire for extended emotional support, "In future we want more support from them [FLOs]."

FLO's and detectives (6 comments). Responses discussed both FLOs and homicide detectives on a number of occasions (6 comments). These comments acknowledged the hard work of both roles, but some recognised a difference in management style in relation to the co-victims:

> There was a noticeable difference in the way we were treated by the SIO compared to the FLO. We felt that at times the SIO lost patience with a member of our family's repeated questions which contributed to prevailing suspicion of the police.

While others emphasised an interpersonal link in relation to the detectives:

> Being able to contact the Lead Investigating Officer during unsocial hours and the willingness to help with personal matters showing great support.

Detectives were discussed separately from the FLOs (5 comments). These comments emphasised the recognition of the difficult and complex role, as well as gratitude:

> I cannot express my gratitude enough […] going through hours and hours of CCTV, taking statements of potential witnesses, questioning witnesses, house raids, paperwork, phone calls, meetings with the victim's family, keeping the family up to date as soon as something happens and explaining everything in detail.

Court personnel and witness support (3 comments). The court clerks and witness support services were recognised as working well during and after the trial; particularly in directing co-victims to local support groups:

They picked me up when I crumbled as I was totally lost after the trial finished […] I was drawn to come back to the Court again to see them because I could be there not because I had to be there. They made me realise that I too was a victim of what this man had done […]

What is not working? (43 comments)

Court proceedings (29 comments). A number of dynamics surrounding court preceding's were considered "not working". Respondents considered the jury process (6 comments) unsuitable:

The jury system as a whole [is not working].

Others cited experiences of jurors who were unwilling to vote on murder for religious reasons, people who were unable to make a decision or those who did not understand the evidence. For example:

Some people clearly cannot cope with the responsibility of making a decision. Some don't understand what is going on, some just don't want to be there […]

Families also felt that the jury intimidated young witnesses and recommended they have their anonymity protected.

The accused were addressed in four comments in which they were considered to be treated preferentially until the jurors delivered a guilty verdict. Families offered examples of: anti-social behaviour in the courtroom, mental health records of the accused withheld from the family, in general the law is perceived to favour the accused over the victims' families and the accused had too much protection.

Sentencing was addressed in nine comments, which was considered to be too lenient by families, a number of which believed that longer sentences would act as a deterrent:

Life should mean life.

The courtroom facilities were addressed in five comments, which were found to be variable between courts with a disparity in the opportunity to be appropriately separated from the accused families:

We then had the trial at [COURT] was not suitable. The layout was small and the public gallery was 10 seats. The other family were disruptive and constantly in and out of the court.

After the trial was mentioned in five comments, families were reported feeling on their own. Co-victims also reported that they received no notification of release dates of the convicted offenders, recommending that victim liaison should notify this.

Police resources and budget restraint (8 comments). Police budget cuts were reported as "not working" for the participants. Families reported feeling that budget cuts undermine their confidence in the police:

The public confidence in the police is not working due to the lack of police on the street. The government needs to wake up and realise the cuts they are making are having a detrimental effect to the police service and the public confidence.

The families suggested more resources for the police in order to: have more police on the streets to act preventatively; have more detectives to assist homicide investigations; improve communications between forces; and fund more CCTV facilities in their regions. The well-being of officers was also recognised in relation to the budget cuts for resources:

Lack of duty of care to officers who are expected to work long hours; they are only human and need their work/life balance to be at the correct level.

Preventative interventions (6 comments). Proactive and preventative interventions were reported as "not working". The families felt that the education system was failing young people by lacking appropriate school intervention programmes, particularly, for example:

More needs to be done about knife crime.

Families felt greater awareness of the impact of carrying and using weapons should be a focus for educational establishments, suggesting statistics on knife crime convictions might act as a deterrent. There was also considered to be a role for stop and search in schools for knives.

Discussion

This research builds on a sparsely populated research agenda and offers analysis of homicide co-victims accounts of the CJS in England and Wales. Murder investigations are a quintessential critical incident, which places the victim, family and community at the centre of the CJS response. This research seeks to create a win-win for co-victims, researchers and practitioners. The work is demand-driven, embedded in research "users" rather than research "providers", a central tenet of evidence based practice (Fyfe, 2013). The findings reveal on the one hand co-victims' positive experiences and gratitude for CJ and police practice; on the other hand, participants expressed points for attention which they feel could have improved their experience of the criminal justice process. These considerations are addressed in turn and the discussion will then turn to limitations of the study, implications for research, practice and policy.

Good practice

Existing literature typically focuses on the negative dynamics of the CJS for co-victims. For example, exclusively presenting police and co-victims as a "tense relationship", stating "these relationships are among the most mutually unwelcome and emotionally challenging that beset the criminal justice system" (Reed et al., 2019, p. 1). This may be true, however this research seeks to redress the balance by considering practices of the CJS which co-victims found valuable in coping with the investigation and bereavement process. Responses indicate themes in relation to confidence building which can be summarised to reveal good practices.

First, education, involving tutoring the co-victims through the challenges and technicalities of the investigation, court proceedings and what to expect through the process. Importantly, education should involve removing "legal speak" and focus on clarity for the co-victim. Malone (2007) points to comprehension of the legal "jargon" as a criticism of co-victims. Second, interpersonal skills and relationship building in managing co-victims were considered critical in different ways. Third, working together and demonstrating a unified approach between police forces, with communities, court personal and victim services. Fourth, communication which is frequent, consistent and honest, and the communication of information in a fair and non-victimising manner. Research suggests that insensitive communication and a lack of information stood out as two of the main sources of grievance about the CJS: "with very few exceptions, most participants described receiving a bureaucratic and unhelpful response from the criminal justice system in general" (Malone, 2007, p. 388; King, 2004; Adkins, 2003; Dannemiller, 2002). Fifth, a sense of justice, which is not restricted by limited police resources. Co-victims have high hopes for the trial, expecting justice. This research illustrates the courtroom can be an intensely disappointing experience, with the perception of unfair treatment.

Good practice principles for CJS in relation to co-victims should be embedded in: education, interpersonal relationships, working together, communication and justice. This research draws attention to FLOs, SIOs and court victim services who play a major role in the co-victim's experience, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. The results presented perhaps should not be surprising given 76 per cent of co-victims regarded the police and CJS as fairly or very supportive (Casey, 2011). However, this indicates 24 per cent of co-victims found CJS less than fairly supportive, so the discussion will now consider why that might be the case and potential resolutions.

Points for attention

In relation to the points for attention raised by co-victims is the importance of distinguishing between what is, and is not, achievable in terms of change to the CJS. Many of the interactions between CJS and co-victims could be determined by idiosyncratic traits or human factors. The investigation and courtroom is an emotional experience for victims and the accused. The rights of a suspect, or the nature of the jury trial, are unlikely to change. However, there could be consideration of the physical parameters of the court and policies in place to facilitate trials for the crime of homicide in a courtroom with segregation of the co-victims and the accused. As well as, sensitivity in the courtroom to behaviours of the accused, or family interactions which could significantly impact co-victims. Notification of parole hearings is a concern expressed by co-victims in this research which could be addressed. Rinear (1988) also reported that co-victims were not always made aware of parole hearings. The co-victims felt their experience could be improved by being notified of the impending release of the offender. This research echoes this concern.

Another balance which must be considered is the trial aftermath and involvement of the FLOs who have become a source of support and compassion. Some co-victims reported feeling lost and forgotten, as a point of attention. Others reported a long standing relationship with the FLO of their case, as good practice. While sustained longevity of the relationship between co-victims and police could act to increase perceptions of police legitimacy more broadly and in the long term; this must be balanced against the well-being of officers and demands on their time as they move into future cases. At the outset of the relationship between FLOs and co-victims the practicalities of the role and the "Exit" strategy must be clearly articulated. The development of a resource for co-victims which explains the whole process (from investigation to post trial) is likely to be of benefit to the co-victim.

The data draw attention to differentiation between the roles, and styles, of FLOs and detectives. Reports in the literature reveal co-victims felt they were insensitively and unfairly treated by the CJ personnel (Thompson et al., 1996). While orientating different roles, both FLOs and detectives should be well versed in grief management communication and aware of the propensity to become desensitised to co-victims. Riches and Dawson (1998) draw attention to the importance of CJS personnel being trained in trauma and grief management.

In relation to preventative intervention co-victims particularly emphasised the role of the education department in preventative knife crime action (in conjunction with police). Co-victims suggested "stop and search" in schools and bag checks for knives. Again, there is a balance to be struck here too, while this could be a deterrent research suggests it could also more likely create divisive relations in the community and make the likelihood of young people approaching police or teachers about crime less likely. Prevent policing (an aspect of the national counter terrorism strategy) is evidence of a strategy which perhaps creates division where bridges are sought (Innes et al., 2011). Educational collaboration, interpersonal contact and not creating a "suspect community" is likely to be the best approach to addressing knife crime in schools, based on evidence.

Limitations of the current study

Anonymity of co-victims has benefits and limitations in relation to research design. First, this study does not consider sociological factors such as culture, gender, age, religion, ethnicity and the relationship these factors have with the perceptions of CJS. These factors are recognised to be key influencers in co-victims experience (Asaro and Clements, 2005; Casey, 2011).

The work does not illuminate the time frame in which the co-victims had been coping with the grieving process. It has been recognised that as a result of the criminal proceedings, co-victims often feel they must delay coping with the bereavement and anger until after the proceedings (Rock, 1998; Malone, 2007; Armour, 2002). It is reasonable that the longer participants had to cope the more likely they are to report positive experiences. If the duration between the trial and the data gathering process was limited, it is reasonable the perceptions would still be anchored in grief.

Qualitative data explain the "why" but not "what proportion" in relation to how representative and valid the perspectives presented here are of co-victims experiences of the CJS more broadly. The data were gathered in a public setting, in front of judges, police and criminal justice service workers and this could have had the effect of inhibiting the autonomy of responses, or integrity of them. Further, the data sampling could be skewed by volunteers who participated as a result of the perceived support they received, whereas those who felt dissatisfied with the assistance received may have felt reluctant, or unwilling, to attend the event.

Implications for research

Research efforts should continue to explore co-victims' experiences of the CJS, and more broadly in relation to community engagement. A result of space restriction in the analysis presented is limited to three questions (of nine asked). Forthcoming work will consider: what does the exit strategy of the FLO look like? Do the public understand what we (CJS) are doing? If you were the police what would you do to build confidence? Are there gaps or missed opportunities with communities? And how could we communicate better beyond the family? The body of data presented only begins to scratch the surface of understandings of co-victims and their experiences. By exploring "what matters" to co-victims and listening to their "voices" research may be in a better position to offer: explanations and potential solutions to the increase in homicide rates; and effective support.

An area for future research is the distinction between "traditional" co-victims (i.e. direct family members: parents, siblings, grandparents) and "non-traditional" co-victims (e.g. partners, friends, schoolmates or colleagues). The relationship with the victim will determine the involvement the co-victims have in the CJS; consequently, this is likely to impact on their experience and the support made available to them (if any, for "non-traditional" co-victims, an area yet to be explored). This could be achieved by developing The National Crime Survey to pose questions to the general public in England and Wales in order to establish the number of "traditional" and "non-traditional" co-victims. Understanding the breadth and depth of those affected will assist in developing support programmes and intervention techniques.

Research would benefit from investigation into the relationship between sociocultural and socio-economic experiences of co-victims in England and Wales. There would also be advantage in specific investigation and clarity on the "sub-types" of incidents of homicide. (i.e. murder, manslaughter and infanticide). Many databases across Europe do not expand "homicides". The experience of co-victimisation as a result of murder is likely to be a different phenomenological experience to that of loss as a result of manslaughter. The needs of these sub-groups are likely to be different in terms of social and psychological support as is perhaps their perceptions of CJS efficacy. These factors can

better assist to support multiagencies and the impact of the criminal justice process on co-victims who have different individual and social experiences.

Implications for policy

■ Dissemination of practical good practice principles: education, interpersonal relations, working together, communication and justice.

■ Increased public spending for police resources to address the limitations in preventative community engagement efforts and investigative capability.

■ Increased initiatives for school programmes in co-operation with police engagement officers to develop educational preventative intervention programmes for knife crime.

■ Consideration of policy in courtrooms for the geographical space and offender behaviours.

■ The development of a resource for co-victims which explains the whole process (from investigation to post trial) is likely to be of benefit to the co-victim.

■ Policy of parole notification for co-victims.

■ Grief and trauma communication training programmes for detectives.

Conclusion

There is limited research which accounts for the phenomenology of co-victims of homicide, particularly in England and Wales. Given the evidence of increasing prevalence of violent crime and homicide, research is timely and contemporary. The work supports the view that it is important criminology turns to understand the efficacy of CJS interaction with co-victims, from their perspective. Despite the limitations, the current research adds valuable insight in contribution to this area, from co-victims in England and Wales. The work has highlighted several opportunities for research development in relation to homicide investigation. This work builds on existing literature, which has largely failed to acknowledge good practice and understating of "what works" during murder investigations, and by contributing support for points of attention, to assist recommendations for policy and practice. It is important to share and learn from the families "voice" and we hope this research offers useful understandings of the relationship with the CJS.

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