Forgotten Victims of Homicide: Covictim’s Programs

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Abstract

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For every homicide that occurs, there are many victims not just the deceased. These covictims often lack the resources necessary to grieve peacefully. Although there are support groups for victims of crime, there is a lack of groups specific to homicide covictims. Financial resources can be attained as well; however current programs require the covictim to find these resources themselves. This can be a daunting task as there are grieving. Even more problematic is the lack of information and assistance that the covictim receives from the criminal justice system.

Research into the resources available to covictims of homicide has shown that a state-wide programs need to be implemented to address the gaps in assistance. This paper examines a sampling of programs that are directed towards covictims and makes recommendations for an ideal covictim program. The ideal program that is outlined discusses ways that the criminal justice system can work closely with the covictims to share information and assist covictims with navigating the system. The program would also be available in all counties throughout the state. Finally, recommendations are made for making financial and emotional support more readily available.
# Table of Contents

Approval Page...........................................................................................................i
Title Page ..................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgement ....................................................................................................iii
Abstract ....................................................................................................................iv
Table of Contents.....................................................................................................v

I.  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................1
    A.  Statement of problem- Need for a victims of homicide interdepartmental
        advocacy program system..............................................................................2
    B.  Purpose of the research & goal of recommendations .................................3

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ..........................................................................................5
    A.  Current statistics on Homicides and Covictims.........................................5
    B.  Frustration-aggression hypothesis and covictims (Dollard & Miller).........6
    C.  Explanation of revictimization by criminal justice system........................7
    D.  Summary of previously conducted research on covictims .......................10

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................15
    A.  Basic crisis theory........................................................................................15

IV. EVALUATION OF CURRENT PROGRAMS ......................................................18
    A.  The National Center for Victims of Crime- Homicide Survivors...............18
    B.  Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program........................................20
    C.  State of Connecticut Office of Victim Services.........................................22
    D.  Survivors of Homicide...............................................................................24
    E.  Justice for Homicide Victims.....................................................................25

V.  RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IDEAL PROGRAM FOR COVICTIMS ............27
    A.  Interdepartmental advocacy to bridge agencies and make information easier to
        obtain and the criminal justice system more accessible to all covictims........27
    B.  Providing grief and anger counseling .........................................................29
    C.  Providing financial assistance......................................................................30

VI. CONCLUSION.....................................................................................................32

VII. REFERENCES .....................................................................................................33
I. Introduction

Homicide is the ultimate crime as it takes away an individual’s life. This damage is permanent, unlike most other crimes. Victims of other types of crimes generally have the opportunity to rebuild or be repaid for what they have lost. Often times the deceased is thought to be the only victim of homicide, however there are covictims of the crime that suffer in many different ways as well. Covictims are family members and close friends of the deceased that are affected by the crime. They are left to pick up the pieces financially, emotionally, and legally.

In 2004, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a total of 16,137 homicides for the year, in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005). In 2005 this number rose to 16,692 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2005). It has been estimated that for each individual murdered, there are 7-10 family members left to deal with the loss (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008). Based on these statistics, there would be an estimated number of covictims of homicide in 2005 of between 116,844 and 166,920. This number only includes relatives and does not include significant others, friends, neighbors, or co-workers. When taking into account all the people touched by a loss like homicide, there is a very large number of victims that make up the category of covictims.

Following a homicide, covictims are immediately thrust into making difficult decisions. They are responsible for making arrangements to care for any children or dependants that the deceased may have provided for. Not only will the deceased’s dependants need financial assistance but they will need emotional assistance as they have now lost their parent or provider. Covictims also face the immediate responsibility of planning for the victim’s funeral. In cases of homicide the victim’s death is sudden; therefore prearranged funeral plans generally do not exist. Many of these immediate responsibilities are financially straining. If the deceased had income
that the family relied on, then covictims are left with the responsibility of making up for the financial loss. Covictims also have their own emotional needs to attend to that can affect their ability to be financially stable. In many situations, the covictims struggle with maintaining their incomes as they miss a lot of work due to grief and court dates related to the homicide case (NCVC, 2008).

In addition to financial struggles, the covictims are forced to navigate the criminal justice system with very little guidance. Re-victimization often occurs in the way the family is notified, what information is released to them, and the manner the investigation is conducted (NCVC, 2008). The covictims are often the subject of media attention as well. The insensitivity of reports can further the anguish that covictims face (Armour, 2002). This paper will discuss these re-victimizations in further depth.

A. Statement of problem- Need for a covictims of homicide interdepartmental advocacy program system

The population of covictims of homicide makes up a large part of our society. Yet covictims are often overlooked so much so that there are very few studies regarding the group. Currently, there is very little assistance available to these covictims. It is very important that covictims have resources available to them to get counseling and assistance when coping with a homicide. There are very few groups that specialize in, and are limited to only covictims of homicide. Therefore, a covictim seeking help will have a difficult time finding others that have experienced the same type of grief. There are general grief counseling programs but information on how to find these programs can be limited. The internet is a great source for finding support
groups, however covictims of homicide that are of a lower economic class may not have the resources to access this information.

Most of the groups that are available were started by individuals who experienced homicide and saw a lack of assistance for covictims of homicide while they were seeking help (Survivors of Homicide, 2008). Despite the support that these groups offer, they are unable to provide specialized help with navigating the criminal justice system. It is important for covictims of homicide to understand the court process, how to obtain information regarding their loved one’s death, and what their rights are. This information is not readily available to covictims. A liaison between the covictims and the criminal justice system would prove to be mutually beneficial. A liaison would provide the homicide victim’s family with important information that would help them navigate the criminal justice system and find funding that may be available to them.

B. Purpose of the research & goal of recommendations

The lack of research and acknowledgement of this group of victims should be seen as a call to action. It is important that covictims of homicide get the recognition that other crime victims receive in order to begin providing them with assistance. An interdepartmental system needs to be developed to help covictims get the information they need regarding the crime, obtain financial assistance, and get grief counseling. The proposed system would provide an organization of individuals that are familiar with police departments, coroner’s offices, and court systems as well as how to obtain emotional and financial resources. This organization would work closely with covictims to provide them with the assistance they currently are lacking.

This paper will examine past studies regarding covictims of homicide. Then the existing programs available to covictims will be described. By studying the literature and current
programs associated with this topic it will be possible to determine what is missing from current programs and offer suggestions as to how these programs can be improved. Finally, the paper will provide a recommendation for an interdepartmental system that will act as a liaison to co-victims therefore making it easier to navigate the criminal justice system, find funding, and obtain necessary counseling.
II. Literature Review

Although there is a lot of research on homicide victims, there is little research on covictims of homicide. What research does exist shows a large number of individuals that are affected by homicide. The Frustration and Aggression hypothesis is an example of how the lack of support and guidance offered to covictims can lead to despair. Not only is there a lack of support, but the criminal justice system also inadvertently revictimizes the victims. Therefore, it is important to develop programs and protocols to help and protect covictims.

A. Current statistics on Homicides and Covictims

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting program reported 14,180 homicides in 2008 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2009). The Uniform Crime Reporting program gathers demographics of the homicide victims as well. In 2008, 78.2 percent of the victims were identified as males (FBI, 2009). The majority of the victims were white at 49.0 percent, which was closely followed by 48.6 percent of the victims being identified as black (FBI, 2009). Only 2.3 percent of the victims in 2008 were of other races and 239 victims’ races were unable to be identified (FBI, 2009).

Of the 14,180 victims that were murdered in the United States in 2008, 54.7 percent of them were killed by an acquaintance (FBI, 2009). An acquaintance can be defined as a neighbor, boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, etc (FBI, 2009). Another 22.0 percent were killed by a stranger (FBI, 2009). In only 23.3 percent of the homicides occurring in 2008 were the victims killed by a family member (FBI, 2009). This information is very important to this study as covictims are generally not the ones responsible for the homicide. Even in cases where the perpetrator is a family member, there are other family members that will fit into the category of covictims.
In the more recent years, prior to 2008, the number of homicide victims has ranged between approximately 15,000 and 17,000 per year. Homicide affects more individuals than just the victim. It has been estimated that there are between seven and ten close relatives for every one homicide victim (NCVC, 2008). This estimation does not include significant others, friends, neighbors, or co-workers (NCVC, 2008). These covictims make up a substantial portion of society yet they are not included in the crime statistics as other crime victims are (Armour, 2002). As a result of this neglect, mental health professionals are often not equipped to care for covictims as their emotional trials are unique compared to other crime victims (Armour, 2002). Those that are left behind by the homicide victims are not only mourning their loss, but they are now forced to deal with financial losses, funeral arrangements, and dealing with the criminal justice system.

As homicide rates rise, so does the number of covictims of homicide. Covictims are becoming a larger population within society. This makes the issue of providing assistance to this group of individuals even more important. Increasing technology has contributed to keeping families and friends in closer contact despite being in different geographical locations. This results in larger groups of tight knit friends and families than in previous generations.

**B. Frustration-aggression hypothesis and covictims (Dollard & Miller)**

Dollard and Miller et al. developed the frustration-aggression hypothesis which emphasizes the importance of acknowledging covictims as a victim of homicide and providing them with the necessary support. The frustration-aggression hypothesis address why an individual may react with aggression or anger to a frustrating situation (Funder, 2004). This anger and aggression may not be directed at the person or situation that caused the frustration,
but instead has the potential to be directed at another target that is more accessible (Funder, 2004). The frustration-aggression hypothesis is a “natural, biological reaction” that causes an individual to “lash out” when they are frustrated about a set of circumstances that has occurred (Funder, 2004). The more important the set of circumstances that occurred are to the individual, the higher their level of frustration and aggression will be (Funder, 2004). Therefore, an individual who just lost a loved one to homicide is likely to have a very high level of frustration and anger as they are unable to fix the set of circumstances. It is important for covictims to be given the necessary support and cooperation from the criminal justice system in order to prevent further frustration and aggression. If covictims do not receive the assistance necessary to cope with the frustration and aggression brought on by the crime, there is a risk of them suffering from severe levels of anger.

C. Explanation of revictimization by criminal justice system

The revictimization of covictims by the criminal justice system can happen in many different ways. Covictims will come in contact with many different agencies throughout the homicide investigation which results in a higher likelihood for revictimization. The first chance of revictimization comes from the way in which the victim’s family is notified. Ideally, that family would be notified by a trained professional that is able to soften the blow; however this is not always the case (NCVC, 2008). An example of this form of revictimization can be seen in how one covictim found out her loved one had been murdered: “The policeman said to us, ‘You people get out of here… get the hell out of here. We’re dealing with a homicide.’ That’s how we found out.” (NCVC, 2008).
When police officers are conducting a homicide investigation it is often not clear initially who is to blame for the murder. Therefore, after the family is aware of the homicide they are often not given many details and they may even be questioned if they are thought to be possible suspects (NCVC, 2008). This can have a large impact on covictims that are law-abiding citizens and see this treatment as embarrassing. Covictims that perceive themselves in this way may feel revictimized by the criminal justice system that they expect to protect them, which can be very damaging and could cause them to lose faith in the system (NCVC, 2008).

After coming into contact with law enforcement, the next step in a homicide investigation will put the covictims in contact with the detectives and the Coroner’s Office (or medical examiner). In a homicide investigation, the victim’s body is evidence. As a result an autopsy will likely be necessary, despite the family’s wishes. The body also may be delayed in being released to a funeral home for burial arrangements (NCVC, 2008). This may cause distress to the covictims (NCVC, 2008). In order to avoid revictimization at this point in the investigation, the family should be informed of why the victim’s body cannot be released so they may understand that it is in the best interest of solving the murder that all forensic evidence is collected. Without an explanation, covictims may feel as though they are not being treated fairly and may become concerned that their loved one’s body is also not being treated with respect.

Once the body is released and the investigation portion is completed, the covictims may be given autopsy reports and police reports without receiving an explanation regarding the information they contain (NCVC, 2008). The covictims may not have the education or resources to decipher the material in the reports, especially in an autopsy report that contains medical terminology.
As the homicide case goes to trial, families of the victim often question what their rights are, since navigating the judiciary system can be very confusing (NCVC, 2008). Covictims often perceive that they are not receiving justice, and that their loved one is not being respected which results in distress and a further loss of trust in the criminal justice system and society. The National Center of Victims of Crime discusses how terms used in court to describe the victim such as “the body, the victim, or the deceased” can cause anguish to the covictims as they feel their loved one is being dehumanized (NCVC, 2008). The covictims are often not allowed to be in the court proceedings due to their involvement in the case such as offering testimony, and when they are allowed to be present they generally are told to contain their emotion in an effort to not harm the trial (NCVC, 2008). This can be emotionally draining for the covictims as they sit and hear the descriptive and painful details of their loved ones final moments all while facing the alleged killer (NCVC, 2008). Once the trial is complete, the pain does not end for the covictims as they will encounter appeals and parole hearings for many years to come. They may also find that the murderer will not serve the sentence they were originally given (NCVC, 2008). Some covictims will face a “not guilty” verdict which many covictims have stated makes them feel like nobody cares about their loved one’s death (NCVC, 2008).

During the entire criminal justice system’s interaction with the covictim, the media will also be involved. Covictims often report being harassed by the media (NCVC, 2008). In some cases the media is responsible for breaking news to the covictims that members of the criminal justice system have failed to share (Armour, 2002). The victim’s life will also be on display as the media delves into information that interest the public at the expense of the covictims.

The complexity of the criminal justice system leaves many opportunities for revictimization of covictims of homicide. Some of the potential of revictimization is unavoidable as members of
the criminal justice system must maintain the integrity of the case and not divulge any information that may hinder a successful prosecution of the guilty party. However, many of the risks of revictimization of the covictims could be eliminated by having a covictim’s advocacy program that relays information and provides explanations so the victims’ families have a better understanding of why certain things are happening and what the information available to them means. This is especially true when considering aspects of decency, such as how the covictims are notified of the homicide.

D. Summary of previously conducted research on covictims

There are few studies that have been conducted to date that focus primarily on covictims of homicide. Most of the information regarding these victims is available through compiled information that has been published by support groups and victim assistance groups. The lack of studies regarding covictims is imperative to the argument that covictims often go unnoticed and therefore unassisted. In order to understand what covictims need to cope following the crime, it is important to understand what they experience. There are many elements to their experience including their initial reaction, grieving process, interaction with the criminal justice system, and burdens as a result of their victimization.

Christopher Horne’s article *Families of Homicide Victims: Service Utilization Patterns of Extra- and Intrafamilial Homicide Survivors* discusses the burdens that are placed on covictims of homicide. Horne acknowledges the internal and external factors that impact covictims of homicide such as the grief they experience and their interactions with advocacy groups (Horne, 2003). The wide range of covictims’ needs is broken down into three expansive categories: practical and concrete services, psychoemotional support, and advocacy (Horne, 2003).
Horne’s description of the practical and concrete services that are needed includes planning the victim’s funeral as well as continuing everyday-type tasks. Immediately following a homicide, the covictims are thrust into making plans and decisions that are very taxing considering the traumatic experience they just experienced. Family members have to be notified of the death, arrangements need to be made for the funeral and guests coming from out of town, and finances need to be determined (Horne, 2003). The list of concrete tasks that need to be performed is ever expansive and continues on from filing paperwork to managing the victim’s household. In some cases, the covictim is even required to make arrangements for the crime scene to be cleaned (Horne, 2003). All of these tasks are further complicated by the grief process.

Emotional and psychological support is often needed to assist in the grieving process (Horne, 2003). This type of support can come in many different forms and is a priority of covictims of homicide as the grief process is more complicated and extreme than that of non-violent deaths (Horne, 2003). Losing a loved one is always a difficult process. For covictims of homicide, their loved one’s death is sudden, unexpected, and traumatic. The grief that one experiences when losing a loved one to homicide is different than other types of grief. The victim’s death is violent and difficult to comprehend (Network of Victim Assistance, 2001). In some cases the covictim will not have an explanation as to why their loved one was killed. In other cases, the victim will have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The motives of homicide can be very difficult to comprehend especially for the covictims. There is an element present in homicides that is not present in other types of grieving, and that is comprehending that someone was willing to take the loved one’s life. In some cases, the killer may have even planned on committing the homicide. For covictims this is difficult to fathom
because that victim was loved by them. It also brings to light the realization that as individuals we do not control everything that happens in our lives (NCVC, 2008). Trying to understand the motive of homicide can be one of the most difficult aspects of the murder for the covictim (NCVC, 2008).

When trying to uncover the motive of homicide, covictims are exposed to a lengthy police investigation that can result in feeling “socially stigmatized” (Armour, 2002). The investigation into their loved one’s murder can result in the victim of the homicide being blamed or slandered as a result of the way they lived their life (Armour, 2002). For example, if the murder were drug related in motive, the covictims may experience judgment by members of their community for what lifestyle choices their loved one made.

The grieving process is another hurdle that covictims will encounter that will continue for many years to come. In situations where the victim is a child, the family may re-experience the grief as they see children the victim’s age reaching milestones that their child did not get to experience, such as graduation, marriage, and starting a family (NOVA, 2001). This can cause guilt for surviving siblings as well (NOVA, 2001). Covictims may also struggle with the status of their relationship to the deceased. When relationships are strained or in turmoil the covictim will be left with the unresolved issues, in addition to the loss itself (NOVA, 2001).

The Network of Victim Assistance further describes the difficulty that covictims face when discussing grief reactions. Different factors such as how the individual died, the age of the victim, and social and cultural factors can impact how the covictims grieve (NOVA, 2001). Covictims may even experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following a homicide. Studies have shown that covictims generally have feelings of helplessness, fear, and horror, which makes them likely candidates for PTSD (NCVC, 2008). Symptoms of PTSD as well as
grief can interfere with a covictim’s life and handicap them from being able to go to work, relate to others, or complete daily functions. All of the issues that surround the covictims grieving are an important reason as to why covictims need to be able to receive support and counseling following the murder of a loved one.

The internal stressors associated with grieving are often further complicated by the external stressors of dealing with agencies (Horne, 2003). Covictims of homicide often are thrust into the situation of dealing with many different external systems that they have never encountered on a personal level before, such as the criminal justice system, media, law enforcement officials, medical systems, and mental health systems (Horne, 2003). A large concern is that the covictims’ rights are not violated which may require court advocacy intervention (Horne, 2003).

Based on the issues discussed, Horne collected data regarding the assistance received by covictims from the Homicide Response Program of the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis, Tennessee. The study concluded that covictims were more receptive to services offered to them during the first 8 weeks following the homicide. After the 8 weeks, covictims were much less receptive to receiving assistance offered to them as a result of the complexity of their feelings and lack of trust (Horne, 2003).

Research also indicates that covictims also may experience financial loss as the result of a homicide. This can be due to the high cost of funeral expenses or as a result of the loss of the victim’s income. In cases where the victim is a parent, the covictim will now become financially responsible for caring for the victim’s child or children which is likely an unplanned financial burden. In addition to the loss of the victim’s income, there is risk of a loss of the covictim’s income. Covictims require a large amount of days off from work following a homicide to plan the funeral, finalize the victim’s estate, and attend court proceedings in addition to numerous
other responsibilities. Covictims also often find themselves unable to concentrate or go to work during their grieving process (NOVA, 2001). These factors can result in the covictim losing their job and therefore losing even more income. If the victim of the homicide survived for a short time, then the covictims will likely be left with medical bills as well (NOVA, 2001). These financial losses can result in the postponing of receiving education, the loss of the family’s home, and an inability to hire assistance for emotional or legal issues (NOVA, 2001).

There is little research on covictims, but what research has been done reflects large issues that covictims face. Covictims face emotional and financial difficulties that can require assistance from society. In addition to these financial and emotional issues, support groups and research have uncovered a startling problem of revictimization of the covictims at the hands of the media and the criminal justice system.
III. Theoretical Framework

Crisis is defined as “a perception or experiencing of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person’s current resources and coping mechanisms” (James, 2008). Experiencing the death of a loved one through homicide is often a crisis situation. A crisis situation, such as the one a covictim of homicide would experience, generally results in a number of physiological and emotional reactions (Roberts, 2000). In the Crisis Intervention Handbook, Albert Roberts states that the more common reactions experienced are overwhelming feelings of anxiety, despair, guilt, intense fear, grief, confusion, powerlessness, extreme suspiciousness of others, loss of appetite, binge drinking, helplessness, loss of religious beliefs, and shattered assumptions of personal safety.

A. Basic crisis intervention theory

Basic crisis intervention theory acknowledges the common feelings that are associated with a crisis in an attempt to raise awareness for sufferers of these symptoms. By acknowledging the feelings of grief it is possible for professionals to offer help and guidance to covictims of homicide. In Dr. Eric Lindemann’s basic crisis theory, he emphasizes that behavioral responses to grief such as preoccupation with the deceased, identifying with the deceased, expressing guilt and hostility, disorganization of a daily routine, and insomnia complaints are normal and temporary (James, 2008). Lindemann also found it possible to alleviate these behaviors using short-term intervention techniques (James, 2008). Through Lindemann’s research, a change was made in the way that individual’s in crisis were treated. Instead of deeming clients as abnormal, those in crisis experiencing grief responses are thought to be experiencing a normal response to
the crisis (James, 2008). This allows professionals to address those grief responses without institutionalization, unless the latter is determined to be necessary.

Basic crisis intervention addresses crisis through an equilibrium and disequilibrium paradigm (James, 2008). Lindemann’s crisis intervention theory begins when the individual experiences a disturbance in their equilibrium (James, 2008). This occurs when the individual or covictim initially experiences the crisis and their life goals are interrupted by the traumatic event. The second stage is brief therapy or grief work (James, 2008). This stage addresses the basic behavioral responses to grief and is followed by the client working through the grief. This may consist of finding resources, attending additional counseling, and learning how to live without the deceased among other things. The final step of Lindemann’s crisis intervention theory is the restoration of equilibrium for the individual (James, 2008). When this step is reached the individual will have regained the stability in their life that they lost to the crisis.

Basic crisis intervention is important to the study for covictims of homicide as the behavior responses to homicide parallel those that Lindemann mentions. The basic crisis intervention theory states that it is possible to provide relief to covictims of homicide by implementing crisis intervention. Lindemann’s paradigm is also applicable to a homicide which causes a disturbed equilibrium in covictims. The steps to restoring that equilibrium may consist of counseling, obtaining financial security, holding a funeral or memorial, and playing a part in getting justice for their loss.

Crisis intervention generally consists of assessing the problem, listening to the individual, and then acting (James, 2008). Within this model of crisis intervention there are many important steps. During the assessment, it is important that crisis intervention workers determine the
client’s safety, define the problem, provide support, examine the options, make plans, and obtain a commitment to positive action from the client (James, 2008).

To effectively offer crisis intervention to a covictim of homicide a system must be in place that first evaluates the safety of the covictim. This not only means evaluating their safety from other individuals, like the perpetrator of the homicide, but from themselves as well. Following a loved one’s homicide, the covictim may have feelings of intense grief and despair which are important to monitor. Then it is necessary to determine what support that particular covictim is in need of. For some it may be basic needs for survival such as shelter, food, and clothing (James, 2008). In other cases, the individual may have the physical necessities but is in need of emotional support. Then, the covictim needs to take an active role in determining what their options are (James, 2008). This will help to give the covictim a feeling of control over the situation that they likely lost when the homicide occurred. Also, by involving the covictim in their care it will be more likely that they will commit to the plan that is developed.

Basic crisis intervention theory is a foundation for the justification for offering support groups and services to covictims of homicide. However, it also represents the need for additional services that are more comprehensive so all covictims of homicide are guaranteed to be offered assistance, not just those who are capable of seeking out assistance on their own. Crisis intervention also requires that the individual experience some power which supports the argument for an interdepartmental group that assist covictims with navigating the criminal justice system so they can take part in the conviction of their loved one’s murderer. When crisis behavioral symptoms are not addressed through crisis intervention, the individual may act out or suffer an emotional breakdown (James, 2008).
IV. Evaluation of Current Programs

The programs that are available for covictims of homicide offer different services from agency to agency. Some programs are geared toward advocacy at the legislative level and are more removed from the covictims, while other programs work directly with covictims to achieve financial and emotional assistance. State victim service programs are recognizing a need for an advocate that assists with navigating the criminal justice system. Becoming a victim of crime is often an individual’s first experience with the criminal justice system (Homicide Survivors Inc., 2009). This is a very emotional time for the covictim and their emotions can complicate their ability to understand and comprehend the confusing system. A review of the current programs that are available to covictims of homicide shows a few worthwhile programs that are capable of providing all the necessary aspects of assistance. However, these programs are difficult to access, or even be aware of, without a readily available computer and telephone. For covictims that have little education or experience in navigating the internet, the task of finding these programs would become even more daunting.

A. The National Center for Victims of Crime - Homicide Survivors

The National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) is an organization that states its mission is to help victims of crime rebuild their lives (NCVC, 2008). The NCVC is a national organization that focuses on providing resources to victims, advocates for laws and public policies, and provides training to other agencies.

The National Center for Victims of Crime has a National Crime Victim Helpline and a link on their website to receive emails from victims. Victims are tasked with contacting the NCVC in order to initiate receiving assistance. Once the victim or covictim establishes contact with the
organization, the NCVC will provide them with referrals to local resources, such as local support groups if they are available (NCVC, 2008). The NCVC finds that this is particularly helpful for individuals whose loved one was murdered in a different city or state than the covictim is located in (NCVC, 2008). The NCVC website explains the resources that they recommend covictims turn to for assistance. Local support groups are explained as being able to provide covictims with trained advocates that may accompany the covictims to court proceedings, a support group of other covictims who can relate to the individual, and resources that will provide financial assistance (NCVC, 2008). There are also national organizations, like the National Center for Victims of Crime that will make referrals for assistance. Some states have crime victims compensations programs that may help with financial issues (NCVC, 2008). Lastly, the NCVC recommends contacting the agencies involved in the homicide case such as the coroner, police department, funeral director, and prosecutor for advice and assistance (NCVC, 2008).

The NCVC advises covictims to contact a victim/witness coordinator in the prosecutor’s office to ask questions regarding the homicide and to obtain an understanding of how the criminal justice system works (NCVC, 2008). It is also recommended that the covictims ask to be notified when there are any paroles or releases of felons related to the case (NCVC, 2008). However it is unclear as to whom exactly covictims should ask to make this notification. The NCVC works at changing public policies and laws to assist covictims of homicide. The NCVC’s literature states that 32 states have constitutional amendments that establish the rights of crime victims and there are many national organizations that assist in protecting these rights (NCVC, 2008).

The NCVC has useful information to help individuals understand what exactly a covictim of homicide faces in the wake of a murder. The organization carefully explains the emotional and
financial distress that can result from the crisis and emphasizes the need for covictims to receive counseling, financial assistance, and cooperation from the criminal justice system. The organization also offers a number of suggestions on how to begin finding these resources. However, the information on the resources is non-specific as the resources would vary from location to location around the United States. It would be necessary to contact the NCVC to obtain contact information for these organizations that is specific to the covictim’s location. This would be difficult for covictims that do not have internet access or knowledge of navigating the internet as that is the most accessible way to find that the NCVC exists. If a covictim had the resources to learn about the NCVC and then to contact the organization, it would only be the first step of many towards getting in touch with local agencies that can help with the individual’s needs.

B. Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program

The Illinois Crime Victims Compensation program is a financial compensation program for victims of violent crime. The program was established in 1973 by the Illinois General Assembly through the Crime Victim Compensation Act (Illinois Attorney General, 2010). This program is designed to assist with medical bills, funeral and burial expenses, and counseling services (State of Illinois, 2004). The program is available to all victims of violent crimes such as kidnapping, assault, sexual assault, stalking, domestic violence, exploitation of a child, driving under the influence, arson, and homicide (State of Illinois, 2004).

In order to receive the assistance, the crime generally has to be reported to authorities within 72 hours or within 7 days of sexual offenses (State of Illinois, 2004). The victim or applicant also must be cooperative with law enforcement officials and cannot be an offender or an
accomplice in the victim’s injury (State of Illinois, 2004). The claim must also be filed within two years of the crime’s occurrence (State of Illinois, 2004). If these requirements are met, a lengthy application must be completed and submitted to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). The OAG then conducts an investigation to verify the information that has been submitted. This investigation may include requiring applicants to appear for an interview (State of Illinois, 2004). Once the investigation is complete, the OAG will submit a report with their recommendation to approve or deny the claim to the Illinois Court of Claims, which will then either make a decision or will schedule a hearing (State of Illinois, 2004). There is a $27,000 limit per claim (Illinois Attorney General, 2010).

The application requires the applicant to provide information regarding the applicant, the victim, the crime, medical expenses, medical diagnoses, employment history, all dependants of the victim, and tuition information (State of Illinois, 2004). In some cases, copies of bills and receipts for some expenses may be required as part of the application process (State of Illinois, 2004). A phone number is provided on the application if the applicant requires help in submitting the information.

In Winnebago County Illinois, the program’s information is generally distributed by the State’s Attorney’s Office when they meet with covictims. This generally does not take place until a suspect has been apprehended, as the State’s Attorney’s Office would have no involvement with the covictim until that point. This is problematic, as not all homicides have an apprehended suspect. Rockford is the largest city in Winnebago County and had a total of 21 cases of murder and non-negligent manslaughter in 2009 (Rockford Police Department, 2010). Of those 21 cases there were only 11 that resulted in an arrest (Rockford Police Department, 2010); therefore only 11 of the 21 sets of covictims would have interaction with the State’s
Attorney’s Office. It is possible that the additional 10 victim’s families were made aware of the Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program through other means but this example illustrates the need for a uniform presentation of the program that includes all covictims.

The Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program is a great way of obtaining financial assistance through a local resource; however the accessibility to the program leaves something to be desired. There is no uniformity in how the program’s existence is conveyed to covictims which likely results in not all covictims being made aware of the financial assistance. The application for the assistance is rather lengthy and requires very detailed information that may be difficult for covictims that lack basic education or adequate information about the victim. Covictims that generally would be capable of completing this type of application may be rendered incapable due to the severe emotional stress that coincides with the crisis. State compensation programs like this could be greatly improved by ensuring that a liaison is assigned to work with every covictim to assist them in gathering the necessary information and filling out the required form.

C. State of Connecticut Office of Victim Services

The Office of Victim Services (OVS) is a part of the Connecticut Judicial Branch. The OVS’s vision statement reads:

“Connecticut will be a state where all victims of crime are treated with respect and fairness and will receive comprehensive, coordinated, and victim-centered services”

(OVS, 2009).

To fulfill the above vision statement the OVS has developed a program that provides victim compensation, court-based victim advocates, a toll free helpline, funding for community based
non-profit agencies, and education on victims’ rights (OVS, 2009). Like Illinois’ Crime Victim Compensation Program the OVS has a Crime Victim Compensation Fund, however the program also offers information on gathering insurance, restitution, social security, and workers’ compensation (OVS, 2009). By offering information on multiple forms of financial assistance, the OVS is able to increase the likelihood that the covictim will be able to find some sort of financial relief. The OVS victim services advocates help covictims navigate the court system and provide information to victims explaining their rights.

The OVS has victim service advocates in courthouses throughout the state and the website supplies the public with a list of these advocates and their contact information (OVS, 2009). The victim service advocate will help covictims prepare for victim impact statements, assist in applying for financial aid, advocate on behalf of the covictim during court proceedings, and escort covictims to court proceedings (OVS, 2009). Another service that the OVS offers that sets it apart from the other covictim programs, is that advocates will assist covictims in regaining property that has been collected as evidence (OVS, 2009). This can be a daunting task as many agencies ranging from the court system, police department, and coroner’s office may be holding evidence that the covictim would eventually like returned. The OVS helpline is useful in connecting covictims to a victim advocate in jurisdictions were a victim services advocate is not stationed (OVS, 2009). Unfortunately, this service is only available during normal business hours (OVS, 2009).

OVS has a Post-Conviction Notification Program that covictims can participate in which will notify the covictim of the release of the inmate related to the homicide case (OVS, 2009). The notification program is automated and will notify the covictim when a protective order is terminated or when a restraining order is due to expire in five weeks as well as providing notices
of parole hearings, sentencing reviews, sentence modifications, and releases (OVS, 2009). Under the State of Connecticut statute co-victims are allowed to make a statement at hearings, the notification program assists with providing co-victims the necessary information to make these statements (OVS, 2009).

Overall the OVS has many great attributes to assist co-victims. OVS has a good understanding of what co-victims of homicide need assistance with and have addressed those issues down to retrieving evidence. OVS also provides funding to non-profit agencies to further the advancement of co-victim’s services. OVS could be improved by being available in all jurisdictions and having an outreach aspect so co-victims are not tasked with seeking out the services that the OVS has to offer.

D. Survivors of Homicide

Survivors of Homicide Inc. (SOH) is a group that was founded in 1983 by families that were co-victims of homicide. It began as the co-victims met to provide support for each other with support and information about the criminal justice system (Survivors of Homicide, 2009). SOH receives funding from the federal Victims of Crime Act and the Connecticut Office of Victim Services (Survivors of Homicide, 2009). The organization offers support group meetings, personal advocacy and support through the judicial process, education, and legislative advocacy (Survivors of Homicide, 2009).

Within the Survivors of Homicide group, there are 6 group meetings held monthly in various areas throughout the State of Connecticut (Survivors of Homicide, 2009). The location and contact information for these meetings is posted on the group’s website, making the meetings more accessible than most other co-victims’ programs. The website also contains art made by
other co-victims as well as information on some of the members of the group and the victims they represent. The website also contains multiple contact methods and names of victim advocates. SOH provides a list of current legislation that the group is advocating for as well as news of various rallies that the group has participated in. SOH has worked to get laws passed in Connecticut that allow the prosecutor to display a picture of the victim during the closing argument and laws making it illegal to punish a co-victim for missing work to attend court proceedings relevant to the case among others.

SOH has strong advocacy goals and has already proved successful at working to get legislative reform that protects co-victims. The group has strong involvement from co-victims and works with state organizations to receive funding. However, SOH does not appear to have a method in place for seeking out co-victims to offer assistance.

E. Justice for Homicide Victims

Justice for Homicide Victims (JHV) is a non-profit organization that provides support to co-victims of homicide “who fight for their right” (Justice of Homicide Victims, 2006). The organization is based out of California (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006). The JHV’s website states that the organization assists victims with the following issues: mental health, social work, community service, law enforcement, criminal justice, education, medicine, religion, law, funeral services, and educating society (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006). JHV cites cases on the website where the defendant was given a lesser sentence than the organization saw fit as the reason for the development of the group. JHV uses the case as an example of what the organization believes happens following an arrest in a homicide case. It states that the victim is forgotten, then the victim’s family is cast aside, and lastly the criminal justice system becomes
too concerned with the defendant’s rights that the jury does not hear all the facts of the case (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006).

This covictim program is run outside of the criminal justice system and has a clear distrust for law enforcement. Victims who seek assistance from Justice for Homicide Victims are not likely going to work with the authorities in solving the crime as law enforcement is presented as the enemy. Following a homicide emotions are strong and being encouraged to assume that the criminal justice system will fail you will not help anyone especially the covictim. JHV also has a section of the website dedicated to Revenge. The section states that it is “normal” for the covictim to contemplate “how to kill” the murderer (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006). It goes on to say that individuals who advise the covictim to focus on forgiveness instead of revenge are trying to place “unnecessary guilt” on the covictim and likely have not experienced what the covictim is going through (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006).

The Justice for Homicide Victims website has a non-toll free number available for crisis and emotional support, however covictims are encourage to not use the number unless the matter is urgent (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006). The website also states that due to a membership of approximately 12,000, individuals may experience delays in responses to messages (Justice for Homicide Victims, 2006). Therefore, it appears that prompt assistance is not available through this particular organization.

Programs like this are not the answer for covictims. Instead, the covictims and law enforcement officials need to work together to provide the information that each needs so a successful conviction can be attained and the covictim regain some normalcy. Covictims likely will experience strong emotions, like revenge, but victim service groups should not encourage that emotion but instead offer support and direction towards positive outlets for the frustration.
V. Recommendations for Ideal Program for Covictims

After reviewing the current programs that are available to covictims of homicide, it is obvious that additional resources are needed to help this growing demographic. The main issue surrounding advocacy for covictims is the accessibility of the programs. Covictims have experienced a horrific event that will forever impact them. It is ridiculous to expect someone to emerge from their grief and immediately began to gather information and resources that may require internet access, phone access, or education that some simply do not have. Therefore, it is necessary for a program to be developed within the criminal justice system that is available in all counties and in all states that assists covictims with gathering information and receiving help. The ideal program would be available to all covictims across the United States, not just covictims in large cities. The program would be a part of the criminal justice system so that it has the ability to bridge agencies together to make information more accessible to covictims. The program would have case workers that are assigned to covictims following the notification of the homicide victim's death. The covictim would be given necessary information through the case worker and the case worker would be available to help the covictim obtain grief and financial assistance if they wished.

A. Interdepartmental advocacy to bridge agencies and make information easier to obtain and the criminal justice system more accessible to all covictims

First and foremost, an ideal program for covictims of homicides has to have the capability of interpreting and relaying information from agencies within the criminal justice system to the covictims. An ideal program would be a part of the criminal justice system and therefore receive funding as a government agency. By including the covictims program in the criminal justice
system it would be possible for information to be shared with the program’s case workers that would not be made public. For a case worker to truly be able to help covictims understand what is happening with their case, the case worker needs to have specific information supplied to them by the Coroner’s office, the police department, and the State’s Attorney’s office. Case workers in this ideal program would have to receive training so they are able to determine accurately what information can be shared with covictims. A case worker also should have connections with the other investigative and prosecuting agencies so they understand the process that these agencies use when handling a homicide case. With this information, the case worker is than able to bridge the gap between the covictim and the criminal justice system.

A case worker would need to be notified by the Coroner’s Office when a homicide occurs so that they make contact with the covictim immediately to begin providing them with assistance. By using the Coroner’s Office as the notify agency instead of the State’s Attorney’s office, the covictim with began receiving assistance even if the case has not yet reached the court system. This would eliminate the problem of covictims not receiving assistance until a trial is held, which currently arises as a result of the Illinois Crime Victim’s Compensation Program. Once this connection is established, the case worker would be able to act as a liaison between the various agencies and the family to arrange meetings and exchange information. This allows criminal justice agencies more time to focus on the investigation while still providing the covictim with the attention and information they deserve.

A case worker should then maintain contact with the covictim throughout the investigation and court proceedings. The case worker would be responsible for explaining the court process to the covictim and accompanying them to proceedings where they would act as an advocate for the covictim when necessary.
B. Providing grief and anger counseling

In addition to bridging the gaps between criminal justice agencies, case workers in an ideal program would also help covictims find resources. As previously discussed, many covictims many not have the ability to access a computer or understand where to get help. The grief of what they experienced has the potential to take over their life. A case worker should have a list of support groups and agencies that specialize in counseling homicide covictims. The case worker would be responsible for putting the covictim in touch with crisis intervention workers. This may be as simple as making a phone call, however making that phone call may be impossible to a covictim that either does not have a phone or is too distraught to do it themselves. Some counseling groups are rather hard to find if you are unfamiliar with navigating the internet. This issue would be solved by having an agency that works with crisis intervention centers and grief counseling groups. The case manager would be responsible for providing the covictim with information, such as the National Center for Victims of Crime’s help line and assisting them with contacting the agency.

Crisis intervention theory should be the basis for an ideal program’s counseling. The program needs to be equipped to deal with individuals that are experiencing crisis and began intervention by first and foremost by providing the covictim with around the clock support. This may be as simple as providing the covictim with a crisis hotline number for reference or as in-depth as sitting with the covictim to work on counseling. As mentioned previously, restoring equilibrium in the covictim’s life is necessary to successful crisis intervention. A case worker in an ideal program would use counseling, assisting with obtaining finances, and helping to navigate the criminal justice system as methods toward reaching equilibrium.
Some groups that claim to assist covictims, offer ideas and guidance that may be harmful to the healing process. A covictim needs positive avenues for obtaining assistance. Justice for Homicide Victims has a strong message that could have a negative impact on a grieving covictim. The groups thoughts on revenge may be perceived incorrectly and lead to the covictim becoming a criminal. The ideal program proposed would help to avoid situations like this by making the covictim a part of the criminal justice process and offering assistance through positive methods.

C. Providing financial assistance

As previously discussed, receiving financial assistance is very important for making funeral arrangements, taking care of dependants, and obtaining basic necessities for covictims. Locating and applying for financial assistance can be a full time job. For covictims that have little education this may be impossible. All of these factors are only made worse by feelings of intense shock and grief. Therefore, it is imperative that a case worker be made available to covictims to advise them of what resources are available instead of covictims have to track down information on programs like the National Center for Victims of Crime and the Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program.

After it has been determined what assistance the covictims are eligible to receive, the case worker may assist the covictim with gathering the information necessary to complete the applications and the actual completion of the application. A case worker would be able to sit with the covictim and assist them in filling out complex forms like the Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Program form. The case worker would have access to the other agencies involved
in the investigation, so obtaining information about the case for the form would be easier for the

case worker than for a covictim.

The case worker would have information on groups such as Survivors of Homicide for
the covictims to use when obtaining resources. As discussed earlier, this group states that they
assist in obtaining financial resources and could prove to be a useful resource for obtaining funds
that are offered through non-governmental agencies.
VI. Conclusion

As long as there are homicides there will be covictims. As technology increases in our society and individuals become more united despite living distances apart, the number of covictims increases. Therefore, the number of covictims is increasing with each victim. It is important that this group of victims receive the attention and assistance they deserve as the event that is affecting their life is the ultimate crime. Currently there are assistance programs and grief support groups for covictims, but they are sporadic and not always prepared to offer all the necessary support. The covictim programs that are available through the criminal justice system are generally offered through the courts which is problematic since not all homicides are solved therefore they don’t all make it to the court system. As a result of these holes in the assistance of covictims, it is necessary to develop an interdepartmental agency within the criminal justice field that offers a bridge between agencies to provide the covictims with support, information, and resources.
VII. References


