

## **The financial costs of murder and manslaughter: findings from the Victims Commissioner**

### **The Background**

In the course of the last year, the Victims' Commissioner has been struck when talking to families bereaved by murder about the financial costs that can arise following the death of their loved one. The Commissioner has looked in to this further as part of her policy review of the issues faced by, and the provision of help to, those bereaved by murder, manslaughter and culpable<sup>1</sup> road death. This review is due to be published in the Summer.

These were not costs which families raised as a problem at the outset themselves; in fact the issue often came up as an aside - remortgaging their house, or repaying debts. The financial costs pale against the human loss they have suffered. However, the idea of bereaved families having to beg and borrow at such a time does not meet the threshold for dignity and respect which we owe to people in this situation.

The costs incurred by families are more significant when you consider that the majority of families experience loss of earnings at the same time that these financial pressures increase. It is also the case that families affected by these kinds of crime are more likely to come from poorer backgrounds

### **The survey**

In order to find out the scale of these costs, a questionnaire was drawn up asking about the different costs incurred to families following murder manslaughter or road death. Due to the sensitive nature of the information, we discussed its content with members of the Victims' Commissioner's bereaved consultative group who have been drawn together from families bereaved by murder, manslaughter and culpable road death and organisations who support them. This group agreed to complete it themselves and also to pass it on to others who had been bereaved to whom they could explain the purpose of the questionnaire.

**36 completed questionnaires were returned by bereaved relatives who had suffered bereavement due to murder, manslaughter or culpable road death both in the UK and abroad.**

There are individual examples of very high costs, also low or nil costs or costs which people could not afford that skew averages e.g. when someone would have very much liked to have a transcript of the trial but couldn't afford the £700 being asked so they did not proceed with it; some costs categories respondents found easier (e.g. funeral) to remember the detail than others (e.g. domestic costs). Some specific examples are given in italics.

The findings are set out below, with some quotes from the surveys completed by the families.

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<sup>1</sup> A death on the road involving a prosecution.

## The Findings

- **The total estimated costs incurred for the 36 families was £1.3 million** (£4 million if loss of earnings is included); this equates to approximately **£37K per family, or £113K if loss of earnings included; costs arose for long periods following the bereavement – the average duration of the costs was five years** and over half respondents said that the costs were still ongoing.
- The most commonly incurred costs incurred in addition to funeral costs were loss of earnings (35 families) legal costs (22); costs related to the criminal investigation and trial (22); domestic costs (21) and counselling (14)
- **The total estimated cost for 30 families of domestic homicides/ road-deaths was c.£985K** (£2.4 million if include loss of earnings) which roughly works out as **£33K per family, or £81K if loss of earnings is included ie over the five year period)**
- **The total estimated cost for the six families of homicides abroad was c£358K** (£1.6 million if include loss of earnings) which works out as **£59K per family, or £278K if loss of earnings are included (over the five year period)**
- **22 out of 36 incurred legal costs. These were largely civil actions including in road-death cases, fighting estate settlement; residency orders with regard to children. The majority most got no help in meeting costs –av cost £34K, with costs ranging from £280 to £150,000. The majority met these costs themselves and received no help; in only one case were costs met through legal aid.**

*Costs associated with the settling of the will*

*Dealing with X's estate, ensuring the offender didn't inherit X's estate*

- **Costs associated with the criminal investigation and trial was on average £2,500** (the average for homicide abroad cases was £4,000), with a range of £50 to £10,000. Most costs incurred related to trial related to travel, accommodation, subsistence. Again, the majority got no help with these costs although some got help from peer support group

*(£5,000) travel cost ate up a lot of money as we were travelling between Scotland and England, we had also to have accommodation and food.*

*Parking/petrol/train travel during the murder trials.*

- **Accommodation - 7 out of 36** cited accommodation costs- including periods of board & lodging; extension to accommodate children of the deceased person now living with them; and in some cases moving home. Costs ranged from £2,000 to £28,000

*I was traumatised each time I set foot onto the road where I lived because the murderer and his family lived [nearby]. I was impelled to move away, as the only conceivable solution to my dilemma, thus incurring costs to my family which were not planned.*

- **Domestic costs: 21 out of 36** cited domestic costs (a further 2 'too hard to say'); significant costs associated with cleaning up a murder scene, higher phone bills etc. Costs range: from £75 to £45,000

*Cleaning the murder scene*

*Mobile telephone bills went through the roof*

- **Removal/storage costs** - 9 out of 36 cited removal/storage costs; average: £4,000; no-one got financial help. Costs ranged from £460 to £19,000

*Storage of house contents for 23 months until disposal of the estate*

- **Counselling: 14 out of 36** cited counselling costs (two who couldn't estimate); average: £2,500 ranging from £150 - £10,000; Some got no help, while others got help with costs of counselling, others incurred costs of travel, childcare etc. Range: from £150 to £10,000

*Provided through GP but initially quoted £30 an hour*

- **Medical costs:** 10 out of 36 cited medical costs (a further 2 'too hard to say'); Average: £550; majority got no help. Range: from £50 to £1,500

*Prescriptions for anti-depressants paid for by me*

- **Childcare** - 3 out of 36 cited childcare costs often when a child is left without a parent so goes to live with other family members (a few said

such costs included in the other categories); those who did incur costs got no help.

*Childcare, clothing, living expenses, meeting daily child's needs*

- **Loss of earnings** 35 out of 36 experienced a loss of earnings. The average was average: £113,000 (on average over 5 years so c.£21,000 a year); the majority were unable to work (in some cases cited as post traumatic stress- related); some lost their jobs, others had to leave; others got unpaid leave from employer. Range: from £2,000 to £781,000 (highest per year was £130,000)

*Had to give up work as self-employed builder...would still be working but I lost my enthusiasm, desire, and confidence.*

*I was made redundant two weeks before the trial started*

*I had to give up job to look after three children bereaved via the murder*