

“I Want That Money Saved for ‘Real’ Victims”: Homicide Detectives’ Perceptions of Victims and Impacts on Advocacy and Services for Loss Survivors

Homicide Studies
2024, Vol. 28(2) 220–244
© 2022 SAGE Publications
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/10887679221108327
journals.sagepub.com/home/hsx



Jennifer K. Wesely¹  and Susan Dewey²

Abstract

Those who lose a loved one to homicide are considered crime victims, and accordingly may be eligible for state services and compensation. Yet institutionalized constructs about good/innocent and bad/guilty victims can trigger law enforcement agents’ presumptions of how deserving a homicide loss survivor is of resources, responsiveness and support. These attitudes can impact discretionary decision-making about assistance for survivors. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with Homicide Unit and Victim Services Unit personnel at one agency, this study explores these perceptions and their impacts on advocacy for homicide loss survivors. Ultimately, there are justice implications for this population.

Keywords

homicide survivors, detectives, policing, victimization, qualitative, covictims

Homicide loss survivors remain under-researched despite their large numbers; each year 64,000 to 213,000 people in the U.S. lose a family member or loved one to homicide and in the process become known as vicarious victims, secondary victims, or co-victims (Bastomski & Duane, 2019; Weaver et al., 2015). Effects of homicide loss

¹University of North Florida, Jacksonville, USA

²University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA

Corresponding Author:

Jennifer K. Wesely, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of North Florida, 1 UNF Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA.

Email: jwesely@unf.edu

may debilitate survivors for years (Gross, 2007) and impact stability across relationships, employment, and housing. Metzger et al. (2015) frame homicide loss as a public health issue, as living in proximity to homicide adversely affects childhood development, maternal health and parenting, and community ties. Homicide loss survivors have prolonged interaction with the criminal justice system (van Denderen et al., 2018), more so than other types of crime victims (Englebrecht et al., 2014; Sims et al., 2005). Yet as secondary victims, the needs of homicide loss survivors have historically been invisible and neglected (Armour, 2002; Gekoski et al., 2013; Johnson & Zitzmann, 2020), particularly as growing advocacy efforts are targeted to primary crime victims (see Goodrum, 2007; Johnson & Zitzmann, 2020; Vincent et al., 2015).

Likewise, limited existing research examines advocacy or services for homicide loss survivors specifically (see Vincent et al., 2015). Nonetheless, like all crime victims, homicide loss survivors have a right to services and compensation per VOCA (Warnken, 2018). Crime victims tend to generally be unaware of these rights, or otherwise face myriad barriers when attempting to pursue these services (Danis, 2003; Davis et al., 2021; Herman & Waul, 2004). These barriers are compounded for homicide loss survivors, whose secondary victim role often relegates them to a bystander status (Englebrecht et al., 2014), creating additional complications to receiving advocacy and services.

Other salient factors may influence how effectively and efficiently homicide loss survivors are assisted. One such factor concerns investigators' institutionalized perceptions of homicide victims. For example, contemporary controversies surrounding how police cultural norms regard crime victims coalesce around the potential for discretionary decision-making to reinforce beliefs about deservedness that can impede the exercise of justice (Charman & Williams, 2021). This potential is especially pronounced when homicide victims have criminal histories that police may determine contributed to their death. In some states, the victim's criminal history may preclude homicide loss survivors from receiving federal funds authorized by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) to assist them with covering costs associated with the homicide, such as crime scene cleanup, funerals, and childcare.

While a handful of research studies consider how perceptions of victimhood affect detectives' decisions about how to prioritize a homicide investigation (Hawk & Dabney, 2014), no other lines of inquiry about the effects of these attitudes have been pursued. This exploratory study aims to offset this dearth by unpacking homicide detectives' perceptions of victims and how these perceptions can impact advocacy and services provision for homicide loss survivors. In-depth interviews with both Homicide Unit and Victim Services Unit personnel at Agency A allow for a well-rounded examination of these beliefs and their consequences in terms of services for homicide loss survivors, the ability of victim advocates to effectively assist them, and ultimately have implications for the exercise of justice.

Background

The present study examines how detectives' perceptions of homicide victims impact beliefs about survivors' deservedness of advocacy and assistance, the role of these

attitudes on the timing, efficiency, and provision of services, and how these perceptions affect victim advocates' capacities to assist homicide loss survivors. Contemporary police perceptions of homicide victims and homicide loss survivors have emerged in the context of two central dynamics in this study: victim advocacy and compensation processes and the good/bad crime victim dichotomy.

Victim Advocacy and Compensation Processes

Victim compensation programs operate under the auspices of the Attorney General's Office in each state. They are supported by the federal Crime Victims Fund, which is authorized by VOCA, administered by the Office for Victims of Crime, and funneled into state systems with support from federal court fines, fees, and bond forfeitures (Office for Victims of Crime, 2020). Local victim service providers (VSP) are trained professionals, including victim advocates, who provide services and assistance in applying for victim compensation, support and crisis intervention, and information about victim's rights to crime victims. Nearly half of VSPs are community non-profit or faith-based community organizations, while others include government agencies, prosecutor's offices, and law enforcement (Oudekerk et al., 2019). There is potential for law enforcement agencies to be a one-stop shop for comprehensive victim assistance, but most existing VSPs remain external to police organizations (Warnken, 2018). Thirteen percent of U.S. law enforcement agencies have a specialized victim services unit, 12% of all agencies have at least one dedicated victim assistance personnel, and about half of all agencies offer some training, policies, or procedures but no dedicated personnel (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013). Other estimates are slightly higher, finding that 15% of VSPs are within law enforcement agencies (Oudekerk et al., 2019). Law enforcement Agency A houses an internal Victim Services Unit.

VOCA provides for financial reimbursement to the immediate family members of homicide victims, including mental health or grief counseling and funeral and burial costs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). States set their own eligibility requirements for receipt of these funds by homicide victims' family members, with most denying reimbursement to families of individuals killed while committing a crime. Yet some states, such as Louisiana and Mississippi, further restrict VOCA funds' use by banning reimbursement to those convicted of a felony, while other states only ban reimbursement to those convicted of felonies that: resulted in injury or death (Arkansas), were "forcible," including burglary, or multiple convictions that qualify as violent or habitual under state law (Florida), involved child endangerment, violence, or drug trafficking (Ohio), or were major, such as selling drugs in a school zone or murder (North Carolina, Rhode Island) (Santo, 2018).

These restrictions pose difficulties for community VSPs, who may not have access to police reports or other information pertaining to eligibility. In such cases victim advocates complete the victim compensation form to the best of their ability and submit it to the Attorney General's Office, which collects the remaining information. In other cases, when VSPs are internal to a law enforcement organization, the homicide investigator for the case completes the eligibility criteria questions and provides a

signature before the form is submitted to the Attorney General's Office for consideration. Eligibility criteria questions often pose problems for homicide loss survivors, since the behavior of their now-deceased loved one can disqualify the bereaved survivor—who is now struggling to make ends meet or bury their family member—from receiving that vital assistance.

The Good/Bad Crime Victim Dichotomy

Eligibility criteria questions for victim compensation might also be considered a micro-level reflection of a larger belief system that pervades public discourse and understandings about crime, framed around perceptions of innocent/true or guilty/bad victims.¹ These constructs are part of an “ideological repertoire” that individuals draw from, often subconsciously (Madriz, 1997, p. 89). Derived from efforts to cope with or make sense of injustices or inequalities, subscribing to the “Just World” hypothesis (Lerner, 1977, 1980) helps justify these perceptions of good or bad victims. The Just World theory supports the notion that people deserve what happens to them because they brought it on themselves, parlaying directly into victim-blaming attitudes (Brown et al., 2021; Cowan & Curtis, 1994; Johnson et al., 2002; Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Major, 1994). Interpersonal, intimate crimes like rape, sexual assault and domestic violence have been a lightning rod for harmful perceptions of victims and related victim-blaming (i.e., Estrich, 1988). For example, Madriz's (1997) typology of innocent versus culpable female sexual assault victims frames good/innocent victims as those who are respectable, did not know their attacker, or did not violate expected norms of behavior such as where they go and when, with whom they associate, and how they dress. In contrast, bad or culpable victims associate with the wrong crowd, have a questionable reputation, dressed provocatively or improperly, knew their assailant, or were “at a place and/or time considered unsafe for women” (p. 88).

Societal ideologies permeate institutions, including the criminal justice and legal systems. Particularly relevant to this study is institutionalized police culture, which refers to shared values, beliefs and norms among officers (see Schein, 2016), and provides a frame of reference through which members interpret events (Crank, 2010; Paoline, 2003; Paoline et al., 2000; Westley, 1970). In their analysis of police discretion, police beliefs about deservedness and distributive justice, Charman and Williams (2021) note that discretionary decision-making processes must be environmentally and culturally contextualized. As such, an understanding of police responses requires circling back to the larger structural ideologies that situate law enforcement agents' perceptions. While institutional culture can and does shift and is not necessarily monolithic (Crank, 2010; Paoline, 2003, 2004), the dichotomized victimhood framework remains entrenched in the criminal justice system. For instance, when it comes to the crime of sexual assault, existing research substantiates that law enforcement culture applies the good victim/bad victim construct to assumptions about victim characteristics, character, and behavior. Accordingly, this framework influences police responses concerning the treatment and assistance the victim is thought to deserve, from arrest decisions to case processing (O'Neal & Hayes, 2020a, 2020b).

While still relatively under-researched, institutionalized conceptions of good or bad victims can apply to homicide in instances when the victim is blamed for the violence that led to their death (Neely, 2015). These institutionalized constructs originate with perceptions about the level to which the victim “participated” in or “precipitated” (Wolfgang, 1957) their victimization. For instance, guilty homicide victims are considered those who engaged in risky behavior or high-risk lifestyles, associated with other criminals, or were themselves criminals (Hawk & Dabney, 2014; Stretesky et al., 2010). These belief systems infuse discretionary responses in the criminal justice system, when institutional agents like detectives make decisions about how to approach aspects of a murder investigation. Hawk and Dabney (2014) identify a victim typology derived from perceptions of true or ideal victims that direct investigators’ case prioritization. Given that deceased victims are unable to provide information about the crime, detectives rely even more heavily on these institutionalized typologies than they do when investigating crimes with living victims. “It stands to reason that these normative trajectories impact case outcomes, with ‘true victim’ cases producing higher likelihoods of resolution through arrest relative to cases involving victims deemed to be culpable or contributing in some way to their own demise” (Hawk & Dabney, 2014, p. 1144). As such, the institutionalized victim taxonomy can become the central frame through which detectives approach and complete their cases.

Perceptions of good/true or bad/guilty homicide victims intersect with race, gender, socioeconomic class and other social identities. According to Stretesky et al. (2010), survivors of homicide loss in their study reported that they believed the murder of their loved one was not being adequately investigated due to police prejudices. These included beliefs that the victim was “unconventional” by being Black, Hispanic, poor, or involved with drugs or prostitution (p. 884). Some of the sample asserted their case was under-investigated due to racism. Similarly, Wellman and Meitl (2021) reported that homicide loss survivors in their study felt that incomplete police work, oversights and mistakes were related to race, and instances with Black victims, police just “did not care” (p. 9). Similar assertions have been made about law enforcement’s lack of accounting for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). As such, racial prejudice connects to judgments about human value and social worth. One study of mothers of young African American men lost to gun violence struggled with stigma as they felt “their children’s individuality was lost in the public’s discourse of black males and violence” (Bailey et al., 2013, p. 346). This extended into their treatment by police, which they recounted as shaming, callous and dehumanizing. Metzger et al. (2015) also found that study participants felt the homicide victim’s race influenced investigators’ responses, particularly that “unequal racial justice in the United States also played out locally in the amount of efforts and resources expended into solving the murders” (p. 526), contributing to the lack of investigative prioritization.

Violence disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, and homicide victims framed by law enforcement as bad or guilty in ways described above can leave behind multiply marginalized survivors with complicated and urgent needs. Rheingold and Williams (2015) point out those from disadvantaged populations can

have some of the most severe, compounded responses to homicide loss because of factors like geographic isolation, limited community resources and economic disadvantage. People of color must contend with a legacy of fractured relationships with law enforcement (Brooks et al., 2016; Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Dowler & Sparks, 2008) that contribute to alienation and distrust, making it less likely they will turn to these formal institutions for help. This is underscored by the reality that African American men are disproportionately killed by homicide (Sharpe, 2015; Sharpe et al., 2013; Zakarian et al., 2019), so those who survive them are “overrepresented in underserved populations” (Rheingold & Williams, 2015, p. 881). Further, the overrepresentation of African Americans as homicide victims, often due to many geographical, economic, societal, and other external risk factors, can perpetuate the incorrect stereotype that African Americans are more likely to be involved in crime (Sharpe, 2008, 2015; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). These factors coalesce in a scenario in which some marginalized homicide loss survivors may be less likely to trust police to assist them (Sharpe, 2015), while simultaneously law enforcement who espouse perceptions of bad or guilty victims may be less likely to prioritize assistance to those families. This cycle not only perpetuates the lack of advocacy for these populations but does little to de-stabilize harmful (mis)perceptions that can further stymie assistance and justice.

It is evident that institutionalized constructs about good/innocent and bad/guilty victims can impact law enforcement agents’ perspectives of crime victims. In turn, this triggers presumptions of how deserving a victim is of police effort, resources, responsiveness and assistance, which can play out in discretionary decisions. Existing research about the application of these concepts to homicide victims has been largely limited to how perceptions of true or ideal victims direct investigators’ case prioritization (Hawk & Dabney, 2014). This exploratory study adds a new dimension to existing understanding by utilizing in-depth interviews to examine how detectives’ perceptions of homicide victims impact service provision for homicide loss survivors. Agency A houses a Victim Services Unit with victim advocates who assist homicide loss survivors. Having the VSU under the Agency A umbrella potentially allows for greater cooperation and coordination between advocacy and law enforcement when it comes to victims. At the same time, it supports a dynamic in which detectives are directly involved in the decision-making about assistance for homicide loss survivors.

Methods

Participants

Agency A is a law enforcement agency in a metropolitan area in the Southern United States.² It houses a Victim Services Unit (VSU) consisting of eight victim advocate personnel, including one Lead Victim Advocate. The Homicide Unit (HU) is comprised of multiple teams, with two to five investigative personnel per team. This study is derived from in-depth interviews with the VSU and HU personnel. Specifically,

from a spreadsheet of each homicide team, half of each team was randomly chosen to participate. The participation request was initially generated via an email script, with an email follow-up 1 week later, and a final phone call before the next potential participant from the team was randomly selected. Since all but one HU personnel agreed to participate, each homicide team had at least half of its members represented in the interviews, for a total of 16 HU investigative personnel comprised of detectives and sergeants. All members of the VSU were asked to participate in an interview, and all but one agreed to do so. Following university Institutional Review Board approval, twenty-three (23) total interviews were conducted (16 HU investigative personnel and seven VSU Victim Advocate personnel). HU interviewees were employed in their current positions from 1 to 14 years, with an average of 4 years,³ and the majority of VSU personnel had been in their current position for 2 to 3 years.

Study Site

The present study took place in a large metropolitan area in the Southern United States, which is home to disproportionately restrictive legislation on the use of VOCA funds. To protect participants' confidentiality, the authors agreed to situate discussion of the findings more generally in the South. Homicide rates are higher in both Southern and non-Southern geographic contexts where residents identify with cultural values identified as Southern, irrespective of their race (Lee et al., 2010). Cities with higher percentages of residents born in the South likewise have higher rates of argument-related homicides, and argument-based assaults are more prevalent in counties with higher levels of poverty, unemployment, and familial instability (Thomas et al., 2018).

Researchers note the prevalence of high poverty, rates, widespread gun ownership, punitive religious beliefs, and cultural values that legitimize violence as a reasonable retaliatory response throughout the South (Ellison, 1991). Southern cultural scripts, context, and perceptions about possible alternatives play a critical role in Southerners' decision making about violence, with "culture as a strategy of action" (Lee & Ousey, 2011, p. 905), most salient in the presence of others in ways that are more likely to result in firearm violence (Lantz & Wenger, 2020).

Procedure

Qualitative in-depth interviews are an appropriate vehicle to access rich information about participants' lived experiences. In this study, interviews were semi-structured and facilitated by guiding questions that corresponded to general topic areas. These areas initially began to coalesce during the first author's informal conversations with Agency A homicide personnel about the needs of local homicide loss survivors. The topic areas were then solidified based on existing literature about the effects of homicide loss, homicide loss survivor service needs, barriers to addressing those needs, law enforcement and crime victim interactions, and law enforcement and victim advocate relationships. Accordingly, central topic areas during the interviews addressed Agency A dynamics/working relationships between and within investigative and victim

services arenas, the perspectives of these personnel toward homicide victims and survivors and their needs, and their experiences with those impacted by homicide.

The interview guide design followed three primary areas of inquiry (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006): process and context, perceptions of needs and services, and perceptions of the existing department protocol for responding to homicide loss survivors. Process and context, the first area of inquiry, asked participants to characterize: their career trajectory to their present position, specialized training necessary to work with homicide loss survivors, homicide response protocols, the timeline for interacting with survivors, their own assessments of whether the training they have received adequately prepared them to interact with survivors, and whether their training included trauma-informed approaches.

The second area of inquiry, perceptions of services and needs, asked participants to reflect on: homicide loss survivors' greatest needs in short- and long-term timeframes, obstacles that prevent survivors from accessing services, intra-departmental barriers to services access, the benefits and challenges of housing victims services in the department, how their relationship with victim advocates (VAs) affects the nature of homicide investigation, benefits and drawbacks of the VA role, whether VAs help survivors access the services they need, their assessments of their success in dealing with homicide victims and loss survivors, accounts of best and worst case scenarios in working with survivors, and changes (if any) to their approach to handling survivors over time.

The third area of inquiry, perceptions of the existing department protocol for responding to homicide loss survivors, asked participants to assess: the department's needs with respect to homicide response, relationships between law enforcement and survivors, the entire process of interacting with both homicide cases and with survivors, the most and least valuable aspects of that process (and what could change for the better), and an example (if any) of a homicide case that did a disservice to victims.

The first author probed for details as necessary and engaged in follow-up queries, and questions were occasionally added or altered during the study. It should be noted that the first author's known identity as an academic at a university, as well as the visual appearance of being a white woman, may have potentially impacted participants' responses in ways that cannot fully be known to the authors.

Data Collection

The first author took a semi-structured approach to the interview guide to allow participants ample opportunity to redirect their responses to areas they regard as particularly important or otherwise relevant (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006) to the three primary areas of inquiry. This ensured a participant-centered approach to research that prioritized the participants' collective worldviews and experiences. Questions were not pre-tested, as the participants work in a highly specialized field in which it would be difficult to locate individuals able to pre-test the questions, and asking different versions of the questions in advance would have changed the nature of the study.

Data Analysis

Report work for Agency A about the needs of local homicide survivors⁴ prompted this author's interest in developing additional areas of inquiry that culminated in this research. The Agency A VSU Victim Advocate Lead provided participants' contact information. All interviews were conducted by the first author using Zoom, a video conferencing platform. They were scheduled at the convenience of the participant, and took place over a six-month period. Zoom interviews utilized both video and audio functions, were recorded, and averaged about an hour in duration. Following the interview, the video file was deleted and the audio file retained, securely uploaded, and subsequently transcribed and de-identified, at which point the original audio file was also deleted. Transcript data was saved via a password protected electronic file. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees. Since Agency A HU Detectives are referred to as "Detective Last Name" and VSU Victim Advocates by "First Name," pseudonyms mirror that format.

A grounded, inductive approach allowed lived experiences of participants to guide the development and subsequent analysis of themes and patterns derived from the interview data (Esterberg, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Neuendorf, 2017). While there is no definitive guide to selecting qualitative sample sizes (Hennink et al., 2017; O'Neal & Hayes, 2020b; Small, 2009), the nature and number of participants in this study allowed for the emergence of no new prevailing themes approximately halfway through the total number of interviews conducted. After reviewing each transcript multiple times, the first author employed a two-stage coding process. First, open coding (Esterberg, 2002) was used to distinguish categories across the transcripts (Charmaz, 2008). Categories increasingly reflected significant themes from the interviews, and the researchers organized the data reflecting each theme into separate files from which information could be added, subtracted, or changed. These documents informed the development of a working codebook for these themes and patterns, which also grew to encompass narrower subthemes. The working codebook included 13 prevailing themes, each of which contained between 2 and 10 subthemes: time in the position, training, confidentiality, qualities needed to do the job, ways that homicide survivors do (or do not) receive services in comparison with other crimes, nature of relationships with the community, services for survivors whose loved one may/may not have been committing crime when killed, detectives' lack of awareness regarding what VAs provide and their availability, homicide detectives' characteristics and goals, the benefits of working with VAs, police cultural reasons for not collaborating with VAs, detectives' perceptions of the appropriate timeframe within which to contact VAs, factors guiding VAs' decision-making, and detectives experiences at homicide scenes.

The second phase of the analysis involved focused coding (Esterberg, 2002) to identify and collate specific data strands pertaining to themes or subthemes within the interview transcripts. The first author created individual memos for each completed transcript, and solidified analytical integrity through multiple readings of the transcripts and coded data, which were cross-checked for accuracy frequently throughout

the analysis and writing process. The first author remained open to any disconfirming evidence or cases that did not support the themes identified earlier in the process. Data saturation occurred after review of approximately half the transcripts, although the researchers meticulously reviewed and coded all of the transcripts to confirm that saturation had occurred (Guest et al., 2020).

Findings

Analysis identified a total of 120 statements relevant to three prevailing themes that emerged each in the 23 interviews transcripts. The first, investigators' perceptions of homicide, encompasses accounts of the good/true and bad/guilty victim dichotomy (19/23; 82.6%), institutional and police culture considerations (16/23; 69.5%), and the current climate of law enforcement (15/23; 65.2%). The second, perceptions of homicide loss survivors' deservedness, includes conflating homicide victims with homicide loss survivors (18/23; 78.2%) and misunderstandings about victim compensation (9/23; 39.1%). The third, advocacy and services for homicide loss survivors, features effective cooperation and collaboration (23/23; 100%) and barriers to advocacy and services (20/23; 86.9%). Each cited quote is from an individual participant, rather than repeating information from a participant previously quoted in the same section, unless otherwise noted.

Investigators' Perceptions of Homicide Victims

The good/true and bad/guilty victim dichotomy. Just over 80% (82.6%; 19/23) of participants expressed that they or their colleagues regarded homicide victims as engaging in behaviors that contributed to their deaths. For example, Detective Johnson felt that most homicide victims were responsible for their fate: "I would say, when you're dealing with what we're dealing with, the majority of our victims are [coming from] elements of things that they've created to make themselves a victim." Detective Anderson finds that "the overwhelming majority of the violent crime in the city is committed by people that are in the drug game, or in the gangs and stuff like that," and "a lot of times our victims are from the impoverished areas," further noting that:

You know 'cause, again, we go to - it seems like we go to the same zip codes all the time and it's the same thing over and over and over and over again. . . It is really easy to almost dehumanize that type of behavior because I've been a law-abiding citizen my whole life. You know, the worst thing I'll probably do is speed, I might pick up my cell phone and text a little bit, but, dealing drugs and murder and shooting and, you know, stealing and I just don't understand that behavior. So it's really easy for me to just be like, "pfft" [makes dismissive noise and gesture] "well that's not human behavior." I mean it is, but it's not my kind of human.

Sergeant Huger pursued a similar line of argument by contrasting the behavior of "everyday, average people" with those who:

. . . were committing some criminal act, but for whatever reason, it got the better of them, but now they're the victim. . . how many people. . . have a home invasion robbery, someone kicks in your door with an assault rifle, robs you. . . and then you don't want to return the Detective's call or cooperate. . . if you kicked in my door, I might have 100 bucks laying around somewhere, but I don't have a lot of cash in my house and I certainly don't have a large amount of drugs. . . I'm a gun owner too. . . but it doesn't happen to everyday, average people.

Participants in some instances referred to their colleagues' beliefs rather than their own, as did VSU victim advocate lead Gina in noting, "I honestly feel people will say 'they're bad people, they're bad people.' We have to always be careful when we say they're bad people out there because are they bad people or are they the victims of circumstance?"

Institutional and Police Culture Considerations. Almost 70% (69.5%; 16/23) of participants acknowledged the existence of a law enforcement mentality regarding homicide victims and homicide loss survivors. For example, Sergeant Murphy stated:

In the mindset of a law enforcement officer, everybody's guilty. There's going to be some true victims and stuff, but when you're sitting down, you have your personal beliefs, I mean, you know, when you start talking about - you're checking their backgrounds, you know who they are, you've seen them 1000 times selling drugs, you've seen them 1000 times on the side of the road, and they end up dead or they end up as a victim of a crime.

Detective Slate called this the "law and order sense of justice mindset" that "gets in the way sometimes." Victim Advocates also observed this mentality, as Advocate Ines described:

Their brain is law enforcement. And it's not their fault, their brain is so heavily law enforcement that they haven't taken their brain out of that to becoming human. So they're just like, "He was selling drugs on Tuesday night and he got killed on Wednesday night." Ok, well, was he selling drugs Wednesday night? Like, that's all we care about. I'm sorry that you're a law enforcement officer and you don't like that, but that's not our fault. He's still a victim.

Victim Advocate Miranda corroborated this observation: "If you come from just pure law enforcement and you've never had any real direct experience or involvement with what we do, all they think is law enforcement. So, you have to kind of get them to see the big picture."

Current climate of law enforcement. Nearly 70% (65.2%; 15/23) of participants referenced contemporary controversies surrounding policing. Detective Egan, for instance, referred to this as "the current climate of law enforcement" when assuring homicide loss survivors "that we're not sitting around in the office, we're out there actually knocking on doors, we're doing what we can. I think a lot of [mistrust] has to do with

the current climate of law enforcement.” Specifically, Homicide Unit personnel reflected on homicide loss survivors’ mistrust of police in communities of color. Detective Bondi recalled: “I had one particular case where it was less than desirable to ever deal with the family. I felt like they automatically thought just because I’m a cop and I didn’t care about their son and to me it was just another dead Black boy. And they actually made that comment to me.” Detective Johnson had a similar experience: “We hear that all the time when we’re on the scenes with families: ‘Well you guys don’t care about us,’ ‘This is just another dead Black guy.’ We hear that all the time, that we don’t care.”

Perceptions of Homicide Loss Survivors’ Deservedness

Conflating homicide victims with homicide loss survivors. Almost 80% (78.2%; 18/23) of participants shared that, with respect to deservedness for VOCA funds, they or their colleagues found it difficult to distinguish between homicide victims and homicide loss survivors. Detective Coulter, for instance, struggled with the notion of a homicide victim’s funeral as a state-reimbursable expense, even though the survivors are the ones who would have to pay for it otherwise:

. . . if you have a true victim who has no involvement in criminal activity, who has a job that they go to, that’s one thing. But my struggle with the funeral [compensation] is I can pull this guy’s rap sheet and see the 75 drug arrests and see the gang, the certified gang member and see all the pictures with him holding the guns and, you know, his lifestyle directly related or caused his death.

Similarly, Sergeant Huger stated, “So it kind of gets irritating sometimes, like these people don’t deserve any money, but I don’t know how to basically say that they don’t deserve any assistance. If they’re true victims, we’ll do whatever we can for them.” Sergeant Murphy likewise asserted that VOCA funds should only be allocated to the families of “real victims”:

I want that money saved for real victims. I want that money for John that was driving down the street with his eight-year-old and there was a shootout down the road and he dies. And he had no involvement in the case. Or bystanders that are walking down the road, and, you know, somebody shoots at somebody, misses, but yet kills somebody else. Those are the victims I want to see compensated, I don’t want to see Larry who is breaking into a store, the store owner shoots and kills him and Larry’s family gets money because he was shot and killed.⁵ That’s not what this money should be intended for, it should be intended for the victims, and if that person is actually going to, ultimately, be a suspect that’s involved in the criminal act, if you’re asking me, no. I mean, I’m prejudiced against that because my position is they shouldn’t be getting a dime, matter of fact, the family should have to pay, truthfully. I mean they should have to pay back. I wish they could go back and bill a family for all the expenses that Agency A and Fire Rescue has all put towards this effort, they should be billed.

Victim Advocate Nancy recognized how investigators tended to fuse survivor deservedness to dichotomized victim constructs because “there’s also a misconception, if they committed the crime or they were doing this, that their families don’t need hope and don’t need help.” Victim Advocate Lead Gina recounted a case in which a family of homicide loss survivors did not have \$750 for the funeral of their son, a homicide victim, a scenario she described as “I don’t have a job, I have three kids, and I have to find a way to feed them and myself, my son just died, you’re telling me you can’t give me assistance to bury him, what am I going to do, where do I go?” Sergeant Donahue attributed the conflation of victim behavior and survivor deservedness to some Detectives’ inexperience, noting that:

It is just like myself when I first came in, there was not a separation. I thought that this person may have had some involvement into the reasons why they were killed, so yes, there is a resentment factor that the family members are able to get benefits that some others are not. But as you start to grow as an Investigator, I think you start to see big picture, because the more and more investigations you work as a Lead, I think the understanding becomes a lot more clear. I think that’s what you will hear sometimes with just a level of inexperience. Because what about some of these victims, they leave children behind, the children didn’t sign up for this stuff so, if we’re able to help the caretakers of the loved ones that were lost and left behind, I think we owe it to the families.

Misunderstandings about victim compensation. Just under 40% (39.1%; 9/23) of participants shared inaccurate perceptions of the origins and legally appropriate uses of VOCA funds, which derive from fines, penalty assessments, and bond forfeitures collected from convicted federal offenders. While it is true that these funds are public money that could be used for other purposes, misunderstandings about its origins proved a source of frustration for some participants. For example, Detective Slate stated, “I think that’s probably a big part of it, is not definitively knowing [the victim’s behavior] and not being comfortable giving up money. . . I’m not going to let them rob me, rob the system one more time.” Detective Anderson also invoked mistaken claims, noting, “it’s taxpayer money. I feel sorry for the families, I do, but you can’t be out there committing crimes and expect to . . . but I’ll make sure the dope dealer gets a proper send-off!” As Victim Advocate Nancy explained:

I think some of the Detectives think that Victim Compensation is just free money from taxpayers, and they don’t understand how the program of Victim Services is paid for. It’s not based on taxpayers’ money, so there’s that misconception there . . . Well, the money that comes in is money that’s paid as a result of felons’ court fines and penalties. So that money comes in and helps to fund Victim Compensation.

Victim Advocates are well-versed in the various facets of victim compensation, since their central role is to assist homicide loss survivors (along with other crime victims). Yet Agency A detectives’ perspectives can both directly and indirectly impact the ability of Victim Advocates to provide this assistance.

Advocacy and Services for Homicide Loss Survivors

Effective cooperation and collaboration. All (100%; 23/23) participants believed that detectives are more readily able to fully focus on investigation when they can route homicide loss survivors to Victim Advocates. Detective Grant found that delegating survivor needs to Victim Advocates was particularly helpful while serving as Lead on a case:

We're the initial ones on the case, but being able to delegate some of the stuff will basically take a lot off of my plate. Like me trying to do research and trying to find services for this family, because they'll call me because I'm the Lead Detective and they're like, "Hey, you know, I have this issue. I have that issue," so having Victim Services there, and to be able to delegate that to Victim Services because they have more information in that area is a plus.

Sergeant Huger identified that the ways Victim Advocates can step in to alleviate pressure on Detectives:

There's a lot of things the Advocates, in my point of view, can do that the Detectives, one, don't have the time to do, and two, they don't have the experience. Victim Advocates are able to actually identify the [survivors'] needs. There's things that we just can't provide them. I mean so it's great that we have some where that we can just say, "Hey here's a phone number," or, "Hey let me call somebody and get them out here to the scene." Advocates can actually take that [on] and it's not a burden, but they can take that pressure off of us and the Detectives, so Detectives can go do their job and let the Advocates handle that aspect of it.

Detectives and Sergeants appreciated the benefits of Victim Advocates as a "bridge" between law enforcement and victims, particularly as it facilitated communication and the flow of information. For instance, Sergeant Murphy relayed:

Sadly, certain areas don't have a great trust, relationship with law enforcement. But the fact is, it's nice to be able to get somebody in who's not a law enforcement officer to be able to sit down and talk to these people as a just a common citizen back and forth and trying to direct them our way. That's where it's beneficial.

Similarly, Detective Ridley explained how Victim Advocates can be a "middle person":

Listen, a lot of these cases that I go on these, these people hate police. They don't like us, they don't want to help us, they're mad or angry. "You're not going to help us," "You're not going to do anything," you know, "This happened to this and this person that died five years ago, y'all didn't do a damn thing about that." So, I get it. It's tough. Sometimes the Victim Advocate can kind of step in and show a little bit more compassion, but can kind of like be that "middle person."

Barriers to advocacy and services. Nearly 90% (86.9%; 20/23) of participants reported experiencing barriers to advocacy and services for homicide loss survivors. For example, Detective Coulter echoed others in expressing the ideological barriers to assisting with the provision of VOCA funds to homicide loss survivors:

I think the difficult part for us is the whether the victim is involved in criminal activity or not because probably 80 percent of the time, yes, they absolutely are. We may not be able to prove at that exact point whether their criminal activity had some kind of involvement in the death. So I think that's where we get hung up because I mean if I'm being honest, we're filling out this form going, "we know this person's a drug dealer, we know this person's a gang member." Oh, but here let's pay for their funeral because he's a murder victim. So I think that's the part that we struggle with in here, as far as that form. I mean, who else's funeral do we pay for? If my daughter dies of cancer tomorrow's is the state gonna pay for her funeral?

Victim Advocate Angelica explained how these ideological barriers directly impact the distribution of VOCA funds:

. . . the Detectives have this idea in their head that they are criminal, they're a bad person, they're a dope boy, so they are not as forthcoming with information with them, they're not going to meet the qualifications. . . that's not our business. We don't really care about if they used to sell dope or whatever. Our job is, what are they doing when they were killed? But a lot of the Detectives have ideas about who they were, and if they are a suspect from something else from the past, they don't want to refer us, they don't want to complete the forms we need.

Victim Advocate Nancy likewise described waiting 3 months for a Detective to fill out the form despite the Detective having no proof that the victim was involved in criminal activity at the time of death, but was unwilling to mark "no" to this question due to attitudes about victim and survivor deservedness. Victim Advocate Nancy explains that "I had to get my supervisor involved in this one, and it was just because the Detective, three months into the case, was not willing to budge on 'did he contribute to his crime or was he doing something illegal?'" Well, this Detective was one of the ones that sat there and said that taxpayer money is being wasted on these criminals."

Some Homicide Unit personnel described struggling to reconcile these wider biases with their responsibility to deal with the immediate circumstances. Sergeant Murphy stated, "Everybody's going to use their own personal biases for everything in life, but that's just that's not our, that's not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to fill out the form, unbiased, and submit it. Whatever happens after that, it's on the city." Sergeant Donahue articulated a standard that divided perceptions from professional duties associated with the Victim Compensation Form:

What tends to happen is when you investigate these crimes, we know some of these victims that are killed because of the lifestyle that they have lived and the lifestyles we don't agree with. So what I try to maintain is a professional standard to say, "Hey look,

we don't determine who gets paid out and to what level, our job is we investigate the case, we gather evidence, and we present it to a State Attorney. On the other hand, there are services that are afforded to the loved ones and family members of the individuals who were killed, our job is to provide the supporting documents that they need and then they make those decisions." So I think if you can be impartial by just saying, "Hey if there's a resource that's provided by Agency A that we could assist with, we have to get our job done." I try to explain to [Detectives] the separation that you need to have, one, from the investigation, and the second portion is from what the Victim Advocates are here to do, Sometimes there are struggles, but what we have to do, once again, is just remain impartial, you know we can't be judge, jury and executioner.

Discussion

Study results indicated that a majority of Detectives believed that homicide victims' actions contributed to their deaths, a significant number presumed that most homicide victims were involved in criminal behaviors, and many noted high levels of public mistrust in police, especially in Black communities. Most Detectives reported that they saw great similarities between homicide victims and homicide loss survivors, and over one-third of the Detectives held inaccurate beliefs regarding the purpose and intended beneficiaries of VOCA funds. While most participants reported that assumptions regarding homicide victims' involvement in criminal behavior inhibited effective collaboration with Victim Advocates. Yet all participants agreed that Detectives can more fully focus on homicide investigations when Victim Advocates work closely with survivors.

Crime victims and their families have rights, and most states require criminal justice officials to inform crime victims of those rights, but homicide loss survivors tend to be a unique and underrepresented group when it comes to receiving related assistance and compensation (Goodrum, 2007; Johnson & Zitzmann, 2020; Vincent et al., 2015). The present study's findings are consistent with literature on how investigators' perspectives can reinforce constructs of good/true and bad/guilty homicide victims, with guilty homicide victims to blame for their own demise because of engaging in risky behavior or high-risk lifestyles, associating with criminals, or being criminals themselves (Davis et al., 2021; Hawk & Dabney, 2014; Miers, 2014; Stretesky et al., 2010). Many participants used examples that neatly bifurcated homicide victims into categories of good victims deserving of VOCA support and bad victims underserving of that same support, which is concerning given that the majority—80%, according to Detective Coulter—of homicide cases investigated by this department involve a victim with a criminal history. As researchers have noted, many homicide victims are involved in criminal lifestyles and homicide victims and offenders often share characteristics (Pizarro et al., 2011). Yet evidence of police putting less investigative efforts into cases due to victim lifestyle is mixed at best, with most research indicating that case factors such as location of the body and the crime scene, available witnesses, whether the homicide was committed with a firearm or a contact weapon, and the victim-offender relationship, have a more important determining role in the likelihood of case clearance (Rydberg & Pizarro, 2014).

Homicide disproportionately occurs in socially marginalized communities (Jones-Webb & Wall, 2008; Metzger et al., 2015), which is reflected in participants' use of vague, generalized language such as "zip codes," "certain demographics," and "certain areas" to refer to the race and class dynamics pervasive in neighborhoods where homicides disproportionately occur. Agency A Detectives' institutionalized perceptions of homicide victims often derived from attitudes about behaviors and lifestyles, but references to race and class were more nebulous, perhaps because direct discussion of these variables might be perceived as casting racial or socioeconomic aspersions on entire communities. While there are several plausible motivations for the absence of directness—such as the reality that being portrayed as overtly racist has professional and personal implications—some participants appeared to invoke assumptions about homicide victims' involvement in violent behavior, sidestepping an acknowledgment of social-structural contexts that shape community disenfranchisement and criminogenic conditions. Such thinking risks normalizing homicide in marginalized communities and construing victims as stigmatized Others for whom vulnerability and risk is commonplace (Rohleder, 2016). Othering offsets identification with victims and activates victim-blaming by stifling emotion or empathy.

Findings presented here also bolster research suggesting that investigators' perceptions of homicide victims may have more to do with organizational culture than individual personality traits (Rich & Seffrin, 2013). For example, nearly 70% of participants reported that Detectives have a "law and order mindset" that presumes guilt and associates victimization with poor decision-making. It is accordingly important to contextualize detectives' perspectives within the institutionalized police culture which reinforces good/true and bad/guilty victim constructs. As part of institutional police culture, criminal justice actors may apply frames unilaterally to homicide cases rather than engage in a closer, more nuanced examination of all circumstances. Hawk and Dabney (2014) find that detectives are particularly dependent on such constructs in homicide cases because deceased victims can provide no information about the crime.

Participants revealed that dichotomous thinking about homicide victims could spill over into their presumptions about homicide loss survivors' deservedness of services and compensation. This sometimes appeared to conflate homicide victims with those who survived them, as in Sergeant Murphy's opinion that the survivors of "bad" homicide victims not only should be denied compensation, but *owe* monetary remuneration to city agencies for their professional time and effort. Detectives who conflate homicide victims with homicide loss survivors ignore these survivors' urgent needs. These needs are compounded among disenfranchised groups, who make up the majority of both homicide victims and homicide loss survivors. Officers'—and sometimes homicide loss survivors'—misunderstandings about the origin and legally stipulated uses of VOCA funds further complicated officers' beliefs about homicide loss survivors' deservedness. In particular, Agency A Homicide Unit personnel tended to subscribe to an institutionalized taxonomy of homicide victims as good/true or bad/guilty. Within this ideological set-up, this binary breakdown of victims conflated with views about the assistance, compensation and services that the homicide loss survivors did or did not deserve.

Yet police culture alone cannot explain the barriers to effective cooperation and collaboration the participants described. The state statutory requirement that investigators complete a form attesting to a homicide victim's criminal history creates a scenario in which investigators are required to make assessments well in advance of case adjudication, which puts them in a difficult position. While the questions on the form are straightforward, detectives do not always have information about a victim's behavior at the time of death, either because it is not known, or because the case is still under investigation. This forces investigators to deploy their own presumptions about criminal history and good/bad victim dichotomies while making assessments about the victim's conduct when they were killed. Likewise, investigators may use their discretion to avoid calling victim advocates altogether in order to avoid making these difficult assessments, thereby leaving survivors with no access to resources or support, let alone assistance in completing compensation paperwork. Removing this statutory requirement entirely, or delegating it to the State Attorney General's Office, which ultimately makes the final eligibility determination, would considerably lessen the burden on both investigators and victim advocates.

Despite considerable challenges, housing the Victim Services Unit under the Agency A umbrella potentially allows for greater cooperation and coordination between Victim Advocates and Investigators when it comes to serving homicide loss survivors. In fact, assisting homicide loss survivors is highly effective and benefits both Detectives and Victim Advocates when these two arms of Agency A collaborate. For example, Agency A Homicide Unit personnel recognized the value of Victim Advocates when it came to mitigating mistrust between communities of color and police. When victim advocates initiate contact with homicide loss survivors, they immediately explain that while they are employed by Agency A, they are not police officers and that their purpose is to assist survivors.

While the perceptions and biases discussed here are rooted in institutional police culture, it is possible to move toward a change that embraces the professional standard promoted by senior investigators such as Sergeant Donahue, who reminded detectives to "just remain impartial, you know we can't be judge, jury and executioner." As a supervisor to detectives, Sergeant Donahue's approach can serve as a model. Any change from within may be slow, but it often begins at the top. In this way, positive shifts also have the potential to impact advocacy and justice for homicide loss survivors.

Policy and Practice Implications

Findings from the present study offer three direct implications for policy and practice. First, results indicate that collaborative efforts between law enforcement and advocacy sides can be highly effective in addressing the needs of homicide loss survivors. Agency A demonstrates some success in this regard, as there were many instances in which the relationship between these two entities proved effective and efficient, with Detectives relying on Victim Advocates to take on tasks related to victim assistance. At the same time, Victim Advocates lacked complete authority and autonomy to fully

serve survivors, because Agency A Detectives were directly involved in referrals and decision-making. As such, Victim Advocates' efforts were frequently hampered by Investigators, whose entrenchment in institutionalized police culture reproduced the aforementioned views about victims, and subsequently of survivor deservedness. This was evidenced by instances when detectives were reluctant to follow through on referrals or form completion, or struggled to overcome beliefs about a victim's past in order to provide responses for compensation eligibility questions concerned only with the homicide event. These responses had a direct impact on the ability of a homicide loss survivor to, for example, afford funeral services, receive compensation for lost wages, or access counseling for themselves or their children. As such, Agency A Homicide Unit personnel's perceptions had implications for the survivors' health, safety and well-being. In order to foster meaningful collaboration, law enforcement agencies must ensure that Detectives and Victim Advocates enjoy equal respect and autonomy within the agency.

Second, establishing Victim Advocates' relationships with homicide loss survivors early in the investigative process are critical, since homicide loss survivors' views of the system "can be influenced by the manner in which they are treated at the first response and during the follow-up investigation" (Warnken, 2018). As such, Victim Advocates are central to shaping a survivor's willingness to work with Detectives. This is in the best interest of Detectives, since it contributes to case clearance, which is an end goal for investigators. In addition, organizations that are viewed as valuing the needs of crime victims tend to develop better community rapport and confidence, which can "increase crime reporting, leverage significant resources through expanded collaborations with community partners, and eventually reduce crime" (Warnken, 2018).

Third, stronger community relationships and partnerships may attenuate the distrust in police sustained by marginalized populations, particularly those of color (Sharpe, 2008, p. 2015). Such societal shifts have the potential to erode institutionalized views of victims and survivors, while cyclically benefiting communities and their relationships with law enforcement as these views deepen and change. As the literature on victim-blaming in cases of violence against women has illustrated for decades, police culture has a profound impact on how empathy and conceptualization of the Other drive discretionary decision-making in criminal cases. Ultimately, departments willing to engage in the challenging but worthwhile work of ensuring that all policing is evidence-based, rather than rooted in stereotypes and assumptions, can carve a more direct path to justice for homicide loss survivors and other crime victims.

Limitations

Findings and analysis presented here are limited in several ways. First, study conclusions derive from moment-in-time interviews, which limits the generalizability of our findings. Second, participants made it apparent in the interviews that many investigators in this department were young and lacked the depth of knowledge that can only come with significant experience working homicide cases, meaning that they could

have expressed the more punitive orientation that often accompanies inexperience and softens over time. Third, few law enforcement agencies house victim service providers, limiting the potential applicability of our recommendations. Fourth, the inability to identify the department by name as a result of confidentiality restrictions limits the authors' ability to fully contextualize the data. Finally, any contemporary analysis of police culture must acknowledge the current climate of relations between law enforcement and communities of color. This climate derives from fatal police shootings of at least 135 unarmed Black men and women nationwide since 2015 (Thompson, 2021) and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement and anti-police protests. Study participants experienced local level impacts of the nationwide mistrust and anger from those in marginalized communities and this volatile climate may well have had a chilling effect on how they expressed their perceptions of homicide victims during interviews.

Conclusions

This exploratory study has shown that obstacles to victim advocacy, particularly in terms of the efficiency, timeliness and provision of needed services for homicide loss survivors, often originated with Agency A Detectives' perceptions of homicide victims. Study results indicate three promising policy and practice avenues in terms of granting equal agency-wide respect and autonomy to Victim Advocates and Detectives, establishing relationships between Victim Advocates and homicide loss survivors early in the investigative process, and ensuring that all policing is evidence-based.

Future research in this area will help to illuminate the unique challenges and strengths experienced by Victim Advocates housed under a law enforcement umbrella, which remain relatively uncommon nationwide. Such research would benefit from engagement in long-term participant observation to corroborate statements made in interviews and understand the nuances of interactions between law enforcement officers and VSPs in homicide cases. It is these nuances, ultimately, that shape the institutional culture in which officers and VSPs engage with homicide loss survivors and their communities.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Dr. Lin Huff-Corzine for feedback on this manuscript, along with the Editor and three anonymous reviewers who provided vital, insightful comments. The authors are also grateful for an anonymous practitioner contributor who reviewed drafts of this manuscript and provided crucial input, clarification and fact-checking.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Jennifer K. Wesely  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7941-449X>

Notes

1. We acknowledge that research on homicide case clearance has not supported the victim devaluation hypothesis and that such research indicates that event factors seem to be more at play with clearance.
2. To adhere to confidentiality requirements, geographic location and other potentially identifying details of Agency A are not provided.
3. Sociodemographic variables including race, age and gender were not collected in order to adhere to confidentiality requirements among an organization-specific limited group of interviewees.
4. Funding for the report completed for Agency A identified therein. To adhere to confidentiality requirements, the reference to the report is de-identified in this manuscript.
5. Per state eligibility requirements, since the fictitious Larry was in commission of a crime at the time of his murder, his next of kin would be ineligible for compensation.

References

- Armour, M. P. (2002). Experiences of covictims of homicide: Implications for research and practice. *Trauma Violence & Abuse*, 3(2), 109–124.
- Bailey, A., Hannays-King, C., Clarke, J., Lester, E., & Velasco, D. (2013). Black mothers' cognitive process of finding meaning and building resilience after loss of a child to gun violence. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43, 336–354.
- Bastomski, S., & Duane, M. (2019). *Losing a loved one to homicide: What we know about homicide loss survivors from research and practice evidence*. Center for Victim Research. <https://ncvc.dspace.org/handle/20.500.11990/1384>
- Brooks, M., Ward, C., Euring, M., Townsend, C., White, N., & Hughes K. L. (2016). Is there a problem officer? Exploring the lived experience of black men and their relationship with law enforcement. *Journal of African American Studies*, 20, 346–362.
- Brown, E. R., Wesely, J. K., & Phills, C. E. (2021). De-stigmatizing survivors: Intervening by changing the composition of campus alerts about sexual assault. In A. H. Nordstrom & W. Goodfriend (Eds.), *Innovative Stigma and discrimination reduction programs across the world* (pp. 103–112). Routledge.
- Brunson, R. K. (2007). Police don't like black people: African American young men's accumulated police experiences. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6(1), 71–102.
- Brunson, R. K., & Weitzer, R. (2009). Police relations with black and white youths in different urban neighborhoods. *Urban Affairs Review*, 44(6), 858–885.
- Charman, S., & Williams, E. (2021). Accessing justice: The impact of discretion, 'deservedness' and distributive justice on the equitable allocation of policing resources. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958211013075>.
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Constructionism and the grounded theory. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 397–412). The Guilford Press.
- Cowan, G., & Curtis, S. R. (1994). Predictors of rape occurrence and victim blaming in the William Kennedy Smith case. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 12–20.
- Crank, J. M. (2010). *Understanding police culture*. Anderson.
- Danis, F. (2003). Domestic violence and crime victim compensation. *Violence Against Women*, 9(3), 374–390.

- Davis, R., Johnson, K., Lebron, M., & Howley, S. (2021). US law enforcement's role in victim compensation dissemination. *International Review of Victimology*, 27(1), 43–62.
- Dowler, K., & Sparks, R. (2008). Victimization, contact with police, and neighborhood conditions: Reconsidering African American and Hispanic attitudes toward the police. *Police Practice & Research*, 9(5), 395–415.
- Ellison, C. (1991). An eye for an eye? A note on the southern subculture of violence thesis. *Social Forces*, 69, 1223–1239.
- Englebrecht, C., Mason, D. T., & Adams, M. J. (2014). The experiences of homicide victims' families with the criminal justice system: An exploratory study. *Violence and Victims*, 29(3), 407–421.
- Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- Estrich, S. (1988). *Real rape*. Harvard University Press.
- Gekoski, A., Adler, J., & Gray, J. (2013). Interviewing women bereaved by homicide: Reports of secondary victimization by the criminal justice system. *International Review of Victimology*, 19(3), 307–329.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Sociology Press.
- Goodrum, S. (2007). Victims' rights, victims' expectations, and law enforcement workers' constraints in cases of murder. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 32(3), 725–727.
- Gross, B. (2007). Life sentence: Loss survivors of homicide. *Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association*, 10, 39–43.
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS One*, 15(5), e0232076.
- Hawk, S., & Dabney, D. (2014). Are all cases treated equal? Using Goffman's frame analysis to understand how homicide detectives orient to their work. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54, 1129–1147.
- Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: How many interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(4), 591–608.
- Herman, S., & Waul, M. (2004). *Repairing the harm: A new vision for crime victim compensation in America*. National Center for Victims of Crime.
- Johnson, L. M., Mullick, R., & Mulford, C. L. (2002). General versus specific victim blaming. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 249–263.
- Johnson, S., & Zitzmann, B. (2020). A grounded theory of the process of spiritual change among homicide survivors. *Journal of Death & Dying*, 81(1), 37–65.
- Jones-Webb, R., & Wall, M. (2008). Neighborhood racial/ethnic concentration, social disadvantage, and homicide risk: An ecological analysis of 10 U.S. Cities. *Journal of Urban Health*, 85(5), 662–676.
- Lantz, B., & Wenger, M. (2020). Guns, groups, and the Southern culture of honor: Considering the role of co-offenders in Southern firearm violence. *Psychology of Violence*, 11(4), 405–416.
- Lee, M., Thomas, S., & Ousey, G. (2010). Southern culture and homicide: Examining the cracker culture/Black rednecks thesis. *Deviant Behavior*, 31(1), 60–96.
- Lee, M. R., & Ousey, G. C. (2011). Reconsidering the culture and violence connection: Strategies of action in the rural South. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(5), 899–929.
- Lerner, M. J. (1977). The justice motive: Some hypotheses as to its origins and forms. *Journal of Personality*, 45(1), 1–52.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world. Perspectives in social psychology*. Springer.

- Lerner, M. J., & Miller, D. T. (1978). Just world research and the attribution process: Looking back and ahead. *Psychological Bulletin*, 85, 1030–1051.
- Lucchesi, A., & Echo-Hawk, A. (2018). *Missing and murdered indigenous women and girls*. Seattle Indian Health Board: Urban Indian Health Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>
- Madriz, E. (1997). *Nothing bad happens to good girls: Fear of crime in women's lives*. University of California Press.
- Major, B. (1994). From social inequality to personal entitlement: The role of social comparisons, legitimacy appraisals, and group membership. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 26, 293–355.
- Metzger, J., Mastroncinque, J., Navratil, P., & Cerulli, C. (2015). Improving systematic response in the face of homicide: Family and friends of homicide victims service needs. *Violence and Victims*, 30(5), 522–532.
- Miers, D. (2014). Offender and state compensation for victims of crime: Two decades of development and change. *International Review of Victimology*, 20(1), 145–168.
- Neely, C. (2015). *You're dead, so what? Media, police and the invisibility of black women as victims of homicide*. Michigan State University Press.
- Neuendorf, K. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook*. Sage Publications.
- Office for Victims of Crime. (2020, May 7). *Homicide victims/Co-Survivors*. <https://ovc.ojp.gov/topics/homicide-victims-co-survivors#recent-faqs-i-am-a-crime-victim-how-can-i-get-help>
- Oudekerk, B., Warnken, H., & Langton, L. (2019). *Victim service providers in the United States, 2017*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/victim-service-providers-united-states-2017>
- O'Neal, E., & Hayes, B. (2020b). "A rape is a rape, regardless of what the victim was doing at the time": Detective views on how "problematic" victims affect sexual assault case processing. *Criminal Justice Review*, 45(1), 26–44.
- O'Neal, E. N., & Hayes, B. E. (2020a). "Most [false reports] involve teens": Officer attitudes toward teenage sexual assault Complainants-A qualitative analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 26(1), 24–45.
- Paoline, E. (2003). Taking stock: Toward a richer understanding of police culture. *Criminal Justice Journal*, 31, 199–214.
- Paoline, E. A. (2004). Shedding light on police culture: An examination of officers' occupational attitudes. *Police Quarterly*, 7, 205–236.
- Paoline, E. A., Myers, S. M., & Worden, R. E. (2000). Police culture, individualism, and community policing: Evidence from two police departments. *Justice Quarterly*, 17, 575–605.
- Pizarro, J. M., Zgoba, K. M., & Jennings, W. G. (2011). Assessing the interaction between offender and victim criminal lifestyles & homicide type. *Criminal Justice Journal*, 39(5), 367–377.
- Rheingold, A., & Williams, J. (2015). Survivors of homicide: Mental health outcomes, social support, and service use among a community-based sample. *Violence & Victims*, 30(5), 870–883.
- Rich, K., & Seffrin, P. (2013). Police officers' collaboration with rape victim advocates: Barriers and facilitators. *Violence and Victims*, 28(4), 681–696.
- Rohleder, P. (2016). Othering, blame and shame when working with people living with HIV. *Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, 30(1), 62–78.

- Rydberg, J., & Pizarro, J. M. (2014). Victim lifestyle as a correlate of homicide clearance. *Homicide Studies, 18*(4), 342–362.
- Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2006). *Handbook for synthesizing qualitative research*. Springer.
- Santo, A. (2018). States have money to help victims of crime, but seven states ban aid for people with criminal records. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/09/13/the-victims-who-don-t-count>
- Schein, E. H. (2016). *Organizational culture and leadership*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sharpe, T. L. (2008). Sources of support for African-American family members of homicide victims. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 17*, 197–216.
- Sharpe, T. L. (2015). Understanding the sociocultural context of coping for African American family members of homicide victims: A conceptual model. *Trauma Violence & Abuse, 16*(1), 48–59.
- Sharpe, T. L., & Boyas, J. (2011). We fall down: The African American experience of coping with the homicide of a loved one. *Journal of Black Studies, 42*, 855–873.
- Sharpe, T. L., Joe, S., & Taylor, K. C. (2013). Suicide and homicide bereavement among African Americans: Implications for survivor research and practice. *Omega, 66*(2), 153–172.
- Sims, B., Yost, B., & Abbott, C. (2005). Use and nonuse of victim services programs: Implications from a statewide survey of crime victims. *Criminology & Public Policy, 4*, 361–384.
- Small, M. L. (2009). How many cases do I need? On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography, 10*(1), 5–38.
- Stretesky, P. B., Shelley, T. O., Hogan, M. J., & Unnithan, N. P. (2010). Sense-making and secondary victimization among unsolved homicide co-victims. *Criminal Justice Journal, 38*, 880–888.
- Thomas, S. A., Medaris, D. C., & Tuttle, C. R. (2018). Southern culture and aggravated assault: Exploring the generality of the southern cultural of violence. *Sociological Spectrum, 38*(2), 103–116.
- Thompson, C. (January 25, 2021). *Fatal police shootings of unarmed black people reveal troubling patterns*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/25/956177021/fatal-police-shootings-of-unarmed-black-people-reveal-troubling-patterns>
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2021). *Victims of Crime Act: Definitions, allowable and unallowable costs and services*. <https://www.doj.state.or.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/VOCA-Allowable-and-Unallowable-Costs-and-Services-Guidance-04.2021.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2013). *Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS)*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36164.v2>
- van Denderen, M., de Keijser, J., Kleen, M., & Boelen, P. A. (2015). Psychopathology among homicidally bereaved individuals: A systematic review. *Trauma Violence & Abuse, 16*, 70–80.
- Vincent, N. J., McCormack, J., & Johnson, S. (2015). A comprehensive conceptual program model for supporting families surviving a homicide victim. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 32*(1), 57–64.
- Warnken, H. (April 4, 2018). What does the data tell us about law enforcement-based victim services? *Police Chief Online*. <https://www.policchiefmagazine.org/what-does-the-data-tellus/?ref=027a5b5c65a682aa4d49e614f02006d3>
- Weaver, G., Huff-Corzine, L., Tetzlaff-Bemiller, M., & Scherer, J. A. (2015). Living homicide victims: Exploring the effects of homicide on significant others. In L. Huff-Corzine,

- H. Marshall, & A. Boston (Eds.), *The changing landscape of Homicide: Proceedings of the 2013 meeting of the Homicide Research Working Group* (pp. 174–177). University of Central Florida.
- Wellman, A. P., & Meitl, M. B. (2021). Exploring cold case homicide survivors' perceptions of and relationships with law enforcement. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 36*, 11553–11575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519897327>
- Westley, W. A. (1970). *Violence and the police: A sociological study of law, custom, and morality*. MIT Press.
- Wolfgang, M. E. (1957). Victim precipitated criminal homicide. *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science, 48*(1), 1–11.
- Zakarian, R. J., McDevitt-Murphy, M. E., Bellet, B. W., Neimeyer, R. A., & Burke, L. A. (2019). Relations among meaning making, PTSD, and complicated grief following homicide loss. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 24*(3), 279–291.

Author Biographies

Jennifer K. Wesely is professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of North Florida. Much of her research has focused on marginalized populations of women including ex-offenders, sex workers and homeless women, the last of which was funded by a National Institute of Justice grant award. Most recently, she has been examining experiences of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals who participate in prison-animal rehabilitation programs. She has published in journals including *Violence against Women, Symbolic Interaction, Psychology of Women Quarterly, Feminist Criminology, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, and Gender & Society*.

Susan Dewey's research focuses on the intersections between violence and the feminization of poverty in women's criminal justice system involvement. She is the author of 12 books and over 100 publications, including substantial technical reports for UN Women, the US Census Bureau, and the Wyoming Department of Corrections. She has received research funding from the National Science Foundation, the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and Fulbright-Hays, and the results of her work have featured in national media outlets such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education, PBS, The Huffington Post, The Washington Post, and The Nation*.