



**YOU WERE TOLD**  
A VOICE FOR KILLED WOMEN



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Most importantly we want to thank all the families that contributed to the development of this survey, and all those who participated in it. We do not underestimate how traumatic and painful completing a survey like this can be. Thank you for sharing your experience to help others.

This report has been written by Anna Ryder and Jhiselle Feanny, two co-founders of Killed Women.

The photos included in this report have been shared by some of the families of the Killed Women network. The contents are not necessarily connected to any of these families or women.

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# FOREWORD

I believe that justice was not served for my daughter, Poppy Devey Waterhouse, who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend just three days before she was going to move to her new flat, her new life. This was ripped away from her. Her murderer decided that if he couldn't have her, then no one could.

Since that fateful day, my life was changed. I find myself now embroiled in a world I had known nothing about. I was catapulted into weeks of visits to the morgue, months of police investigations and court appearances, media attention that felt alien to me, alongside having to arrange a funeral that I never, ever imagined I would have to.

The laws around sentencing for such killings shocked me. I discovered that if a weapon is taken to the scene of the crime, then the starting tariff is usually 25 years. But if a weapon is used from the scene of the crime – for example, a knife from the kitchen, as is the case in a large number of murders of women that occur in the home – then the starting point is only 15 years. Once Poppy's

murderer was sentenced and locked up for only 16 years, I couldn't let my feelings about the abhorrent sentence structure go. I questioned the sentencing guidelines immediately yet was put in my place with a categorical 'that's how it is' response from all.

But just because something is 'how it is', doesn't mean that's how it should be. I couldn't let that lie. I met another mother, Carole, whose daughter Ellie had been murdered. From that moment on we joined forces to take on the justice system and push for change.

Seeing the power in campaigning collectively I, alongside others, set up Killed Women. Killed Women is a campaigning network and organisation for the bereaved families of women killed by men. All too often bereaved families have joined our network reporting how the police, social services, mental health services, children's services all fell short in protecting their loved ones. Over and over again, we have heard how the outcomes in our justice system fail to reflect the full horror of these crimes. Justice never feels like it has been served.

Because we kept hearing the same stories from families over and over, our priority when we launched was to build a more comprehensive picture of bereaved families experiences, beyond each of our own individual stories of loss. So we partnered with global research and polling company Ipsos to develop the first national survey of families like our own. The findings are outlined in this report and tell us what many of us knew in our hearts: the deaths and injustices our daughters, mothers, sisters, aunties and loved ones have faced are not unavoidable tragedies. They are the result of a litany of failures from public bodies and negligent inaction from successive governments. The heart-breaking and shocking findings of this report reinforce our commitment to push for action that will save women's lives and ensure justice for victims – and make sure no other families have to suffer like ours have.

Killed Women is made up of an ever-growing group of bereaved families, who go through their lives trying to make sense of the loss of their loved ones. We never will. But we are all

driven by the need to be their voices, to demand to be heard, demand justice, and we will bring about change.

**Julie Devey**

*Mother of Poppy  
Trustee Chair and Co-Founder of Killed Women*

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*This report is based on the testimony and experiences of bereaved families who have lost loved ones to violence. It contains content that some may find traumatic.*

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

A woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK<sup>1</sup>. 62%<sup>2</sup> of these women are killed by partners or ex-partners and 70% are killed in the sanctuary of their home<sup>3</sup>. These murders are brutal and cruel; in over half of them there is evidence of ‘overkill’ – the use of ‘excessive, gratuitous violence beyond that which is necessary to cause death’<sup>4</sup>, and many are killed in front of their children.

As harrowing as these statistics are, they do not convey the enormity of the impact of these crimes and the deep-rooted culture of inequality and misogyny which enables them. They do not convey the deep lifelong suffering inflicted on the families torn apart, or the violence, rapes and abuse suffered by many victims before their death. They do not express the threat of danger many women and girls feel forced to navigate every day.

<sup>1</sup> [www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf](http://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

It is in the voices of the families who have lost loved ones that we hear and come to understand what lies beneath the numbers. That is why a year ago, we set up Killed Women – a campaigning organisation led by and representing the families of victims of fatal male violence, to unite and lend these powerful voices to ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). We have three strategic aims:

1. To bring an end to fatal male violence against women in the UK and to tackle the culture of violence that enables it.
2. To ensure justice for victims and their families.
3. To improve the rights and provision of support for families who have lost loved ones to male violence, particularly for children.

One of our first projects was to partner with Ipsos, a world leading research and polling organisation, to develop the first national survey for bereaved families who have lost a female relative to male violence. The aim was to build a broader and more comprehensive understanding of bereaved families’ experiences and views. The key findings of the survey are outlined in this report and will provide the basis for our work going forward. Having identified clear priorities and themes, we will continue to deepen our insight and begin to develop policy solutions through further engagement with

our network, combined with research and analysis of the relevant policies and public bodies in the thematic areas raised.

We created Killed Women to elevate the voices of bereaved families; we believe those who have lost a loved one in this way should be at the heart of decision-making and law change, as they know better than anyone the true scale and cost of violence against women and girls. This survey was the first step in that mission: a vehicle for families to share their voice. We hope it does them justice.

**“ We created Killed Women to elevate the voices of bereaved families; we believe those who have lost a loved one in this way should be at the heart of decision-making and law change. ”**



Grief is a life-long process in these circumstances, it seems that **you are expected to get over it sooner than you can.**

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was developed by Killed Women and Ipsos, in consultation with bereaved families, academics, and representatives from the VAWG sector. It consisted of an online survey with both closed and open-ended questions. The relatives of women who have been killed through male violence were invited to take part in the survey via email, sent by Killed Women and other organisations. The survey link was also made available on the Killed Women website, as well as social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. In order to be eligible to take part, it was necessary for there to have been a criminal court case which had concluded by the time of the survey or for an inquest to have taken place, the outcome of which found that there had been an unlawful killing. This was established through screening questions at the start of the survey. The survey included yes and no questions; questions that allowed respondents to give a rating; and open box questions to allow for expansion when a respondent wished. It was available online between April and September 2023. All respondents were able to access welfare support to complete the survey if needed.

A total of 115 respondents took part in the survey. Where possible, percentages are reported. The nature of this survey means that in some circumstances the base sizes are relatively small. We believed it was important to include analysis of some crucial issues that had affected fewer respondents but had had a profound impact. When base sizes are less than n=25, we have also reported using numbers.

Throughout the report we use the term 'victim' for the loved one killed. We know this term can never capture who the woman was, or the scale of the loss for her friends and family.

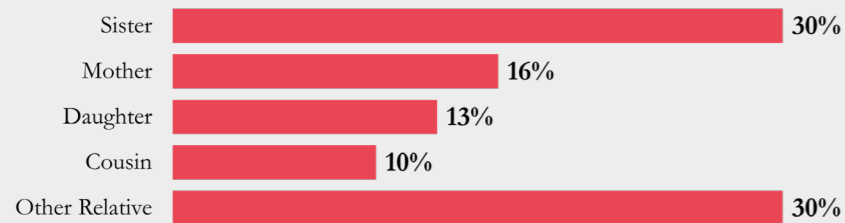
Throughout this report we use anonymous quotes from respondents' answers. These answers were heart-breaking to read. There was much powerful testimony that we have not been able to include, but all of the answers informed the contents of this report and will shape our work going forward.

## Survey participants

A total of 115 respondents took part in the survey. A wide range of family members came forward to complete the survey including fathers, sons, brothers, nieces, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandmothers of victims, but the biggest groups of respondents were

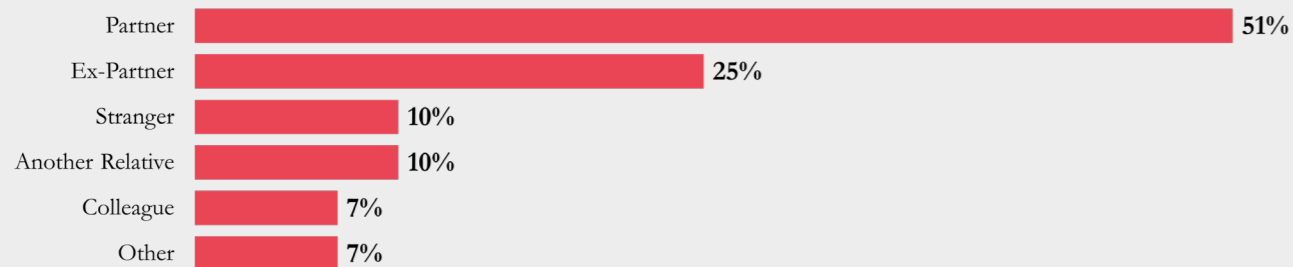
sisters (30%), mothers (16%) and daughters (13%). Just over half (51%) of respondents reported that the perpetrator was the partner, husband or boyfriend of the victim; 25% reported that the perpetrator was the ex-partner, husband or boyfriend, and 8% reported a male relative of some kind. In 10% of cases the perpetrator was a stranger, in 7% a colleague.

### What is your relationship to the relative that was killed?



Base: Relatives of killed women (115). Answer options with base sizes of less than 10 have been removed or combined to maintain participant confidentiality.

### How, if at all, did your relative know the perpetrator or the perpetrators?



Base: Relatives of killed women (115). Answer options with base sizes of less than 10 have been removed or combined to maintain participant confidentiality.

The majority of respondents (76%) said that the perpetrators were convicted for murder, whilst 16% were convicted for manslaughter. Nearly all cases involved a single perpetrator, with 97% of relatives stating this. Most of the women killed were aged between 16-44 years (77%). Many had children under the age of 18 at the time of their death (45%). In 96% of responses, the victim referred to was a UK citizen.

Around one in five (17%) respondents said the victims had at least one complex need such as homelessness, mental health challenges, or addiction or substance dependency and 7% said the victims experienced so called 'honour-based' abuse and violence<sup>5</sup>.

Most of the cases reported in this survey (69%), are recent, occurring between 2010 and 2022, but some cases dated back as far as the 1970s.

It was possible for different relatives of the women who had been killed to participate in the survey. Due to the confidential nature of the survey it is not possible to say how many different killed women are represented.

<sup>5</sup> So called 'Honour-based' abuse is defined as abuse or violence justified to maintain or restore the perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour of the family.

**“ This perpetrator was condoned and enabled by the state that dismisses VAWG until the point of murder. He should have been stopped after the first offences. ”**

## KEY FINDINGS

This report focuses on three key areas of concern for bereaved families.

### You were told

**Just 4% of respondents felt their loved one's death was 'not preventable at all'. Two thirds (65%) of respondents said the perpetrator had a history of violence or abuse, and one in three (30%) said the perpetrator had a history of violence or abuse towards their relative that they were aware of. Respondents reported that a wide range of services and agencies knew about the abuse suffered by victims before they were killed - 78% of respondents who stated there was a history of abuse said at least one service knew.** Families who's relative had been in touch with these agencies and services felt they had responded poorly. For example, 78% thought that police response to their relative's abuse was 'fairly' or 'very' poor. All respondents who's relative had contact with children's services thought their response was 'fairly' or 'very' poor.

### Searching for justice

**90% of relatives for whom there had been a conviction for the perpetrator felt the prison sentences given were too short** and when asked whether they felt the voice of their relative was represented during the criminal court process, 56% of respondents 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed'. Some families also reported discrimination based on race, gender, religion and other protected characteristics and a lack of understanding or education of so called 'honour-based' abuse, which impacted the response from services or agencies.

### The aftermath

Whilst the devastation wrought by these brutal killings is far-reaching and impacts bereaved families for the rest of their lives, **there was a more positive response to how services and agencies responded to the homicide.** For example, 57% said the police were 'fairly' or 'very' good including 41% who reported a

'very good' performance. But there were still negative experiences reported, suggesting inconsistency of service provision.

Furthermore, **57% of relatives experienced unwanted or negative media coverage or intrusion,** and families experienced financial or employment difficulties (for example, 49% reported taking time off work and 15% reported getting into debt). The service response in terms of mental health support was inconsistent and commonly inadequate. This was especially true in cases where children of the victim were involved.

The responses we received were rich, complex and described a broad number of issues. We know we have not been able to cover every element of relatives' experiences; to do that data justice and to cover all areas of concern expressed by families, we intend this report to be the first of several pieces of work on the survey's contents.

**“ Just 4% of respondents felt their loved one's death was 'not preventable at all'. Two thirds of respondents said the perpetrator had a history of violence or abuse. ”**

# YOU WERE TOLD

Only 4% of respondents felt their loved one's death was 'not preventable at all', with 67% saying it was 'very' or 'fairly' preventable". This section of the report expands on why families felt this way. It also details the services and agencies that were alerted to abuse suffered by victims before they were killed, and how families rated their response.

## Respondents felt homicides were preventable

4% of respondents thought the death of their loved one was 'not preventable at all', while shockingly 67% thought the homicide was 'very preventable' or 'fairly preventable.' Those who felt that the homicide was preventable were asked for more details on how they thought these crimes may have been stopped.

## Knowledge of prior abuse towards victim not acted upon

Respondents believed their loved ones' death could have been prevented if the services or agencies that had prior knowledge of the abuse suffered by the victim had done more. **Among those who stated there was a history of abuse, an alarming 78% said one or more services knew about this abuse and 69% said two or more services knew;** this included the police, GPs, schools, legal services, social services and the Crown Prosecution

Service. The majority of references were made to the failure of the police to take appropriate steps to protect their loved one. Comments from respondents included:

- *The police failed her. They did not give her support and listen to the urgency in her needs. Police and hospital both could have done so much more. She would have had a chance at life.*
- *The school was told of the abuse by her children but did not take appropriate action. The authorities were aware and did not communicate with other authorities... Health visitors were too afraid to attend the house due to fear of the perpetrator...*
- *Police took no action despite several written and verbal threats to kill my sister.*

The performance of these services with knowledge of abuse is expanded on later in the report.

“ The police failed her. They did not give her support and listen to the urgency in her needs. Police and hospital both could have done so much more. **She would have had a chance at life.** ”



## Histories of perpetrators not acted on

Two thirds (65%) of respondents said the perpetrator had a history of criminality, violence or abusive behaviour. Of those, 59% said the perpetrator had a history of being violent or abusive towards other women. When asked to expand on their experience, respondents believed that not only should this history have resulted in further action from authorities at an earlier stage, but that they, as family members, should have been informed about it.

- *We didn't know about Clare's Law<sup>6</sup> until it was too late.*
- *The perpetrator had a conviction history of abuse to ex-partner and others.*
- *There are decades of evidence that show that VAWG are serial and escalating offences. This perpetrator was condoned and enabled by the state that dismisses VAWG until the point of murder. He should have been stopped after the first offences.*

<sup>6</sup> The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), also known as "Clare's Law" enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending.

In some cases, the perpetrator had killed before.

- *... The monster had killed before... he had a colourful past of violence towards women, and this was known to all services but not us as a family.*
- *He was on probation life licence for a previous murder. They didn't monitor him properly or drug test him.*

Families mentioned several other issues including employers not doing enough to ensure the victim's safety at work; concerns about the perpetrator's mental health or substance abuse not being acted upon; or the criminal justice system's failure to pursue cases without the victim's consent.

Others believed perpetrators were able to access dangerous weapons too easily through a gun licence.

- *He should never have been given a gun licence... If he didn't have the gun there could have been a very different outcome.*
- *The killer was given a gun licence and able to buy a gun, even though he had a history of depression, lied on his form, lied to the police and the doctor did not raise concern.*

A lack of education or understanding of misogyny, stalking, harassment or coercive control was also mentioned, as respondents felt neither they nor their relative had been taught to identify dangerous behaviours in perpetrators. One respondent said:

- *(I believe the perpetrator) was coercively controlling to previous girlfriends and stalked them. I believe if this behaviour was talked about in schools more and the danger these individuals pose when they end a relationship, [my relative] would never have dated him.*

## Services knew about abuse prior to homicide and responded poorly

### Prior abuse suffered by victims was known about by services

Where relatives said they were aware victims had suffered previous abuse from the perpetrator, survey respondents were asked which services or agencies were alerted of the abuse their loved one was suffering.

Two-thirds (64%) of respondents whose relative had previously experienced abuse by the perpetrator said that this abuse was reported to the police.

“ Among those who stated there was a history of abuse, **78% said one or more services knew.** ”

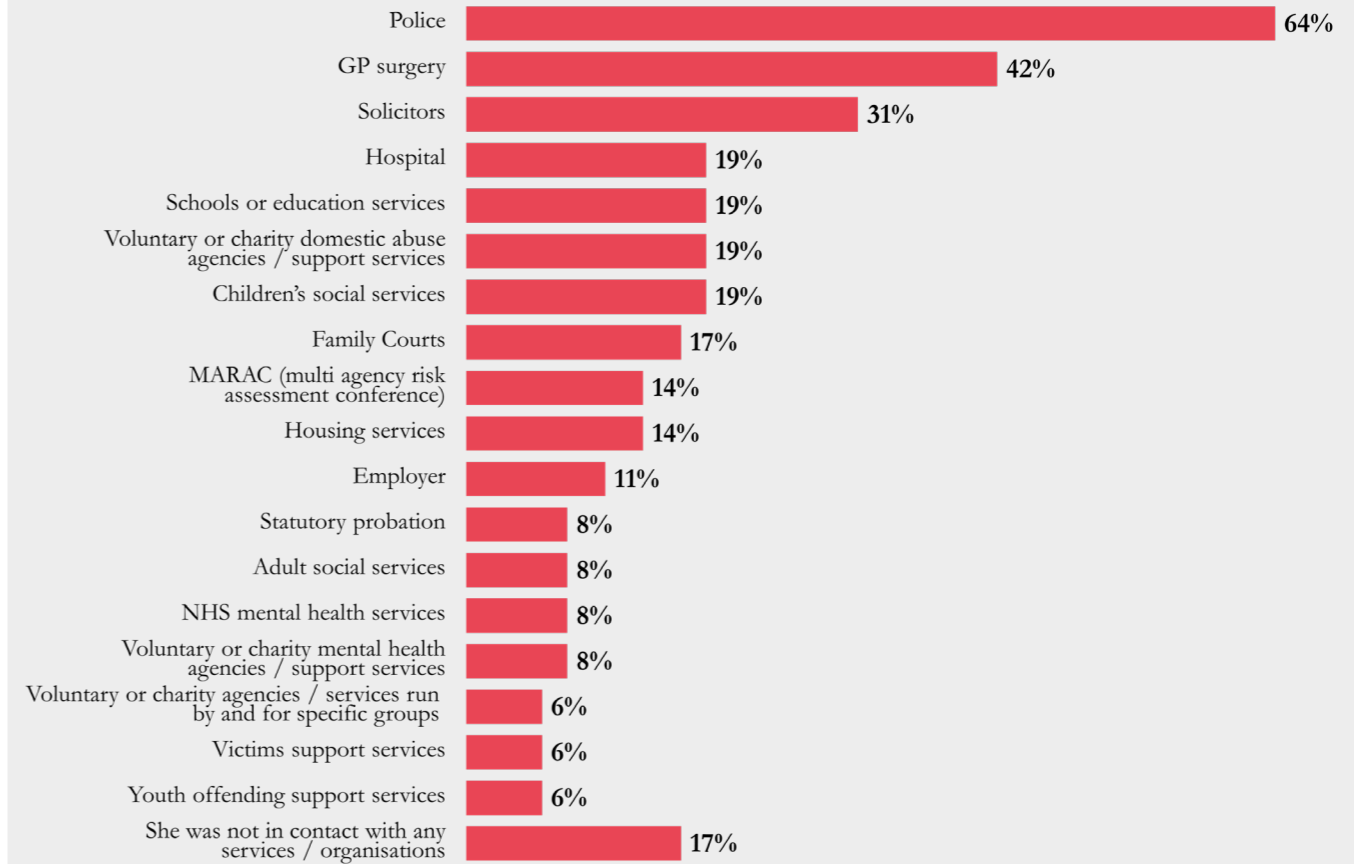
“64% of respondents whose relative had previously experienced abuse by the perpetrator said that this abuse was reported to the police.”

The survey also revealed that other services were alerted to the abuse, most commonly GP surgeries (42%) and solicitors (31%).

The survey findings also suggest that multiple services knew of the abuse the victims were experiencing, with 69% of respondents whose relative had previously experienced abuse by the perpetrator, mentioning two or more services who knew about the abuse, and 50% stating three or more.

- *No one joined the dots. Everyone that knew what was happening just heard the information and did nothing.*
- *She reported threats to kill five times, and one rape report to police, as well as one attempt to kill her. They were very dismissive and racist. School knew about it from previous family reports... Social Services knew about it... There were so many failings from Social Services. Hospital knew about it from the attempt to kill after she attended there for treatment due to her injuries. Police attended and failed once again to support her and keep her safe.*

Which, of the following organisations or services, if any, knew about the perpetrators abuse towards your relative, prior to her death?



Base: Respondents who's relative had previously experienced abuse or violence by the perpetrator (36).

“**The monster had killed before...** he had a colourful past of violence towards women, and this was known to all services but not us as a family.”

### Services responded poorly to known abuse

Many of these respondents felt that the services and agencies alerted to the abuse responded poorly, missing critical opportunities to help their loved one before it was too late. **Of the respondents who stated that the police knew about abuse prior to the homicide 78% (n=18) thought that police performance was ‘fairly poor’ or ‘very poor’.** Alarming, no-one considered the police’s performance as ‘very good.’ When asked to expand, several respondents discussed how the police

knew about the abuse being suffered but did not act, seeming to fail to take what was happening seriously enough.

- *She had made complaints to the police before; they knew he was dangerous, but they failed to act. It was always so difficult to get them to take it seriously even though she suffered being beaten up, and emotional abuse.*
- *The police were useless. They actually admitted he would have to kill her before they could do anything.*

The ratings given to other services and agencies were equally concerning. All of the respondents who stated that children services knew about previous abuse (n=7) rated the response as ‘very poor’ or ‘fairly poor,’ and 80% (n=12 of 15) of applicable respondents rated the GPs’ response as ‘very poor’ or ‘fairly poor.’

Furthermore, several respondents expressed frustration at how the services did not share knowledge of the abuse being suffered with each other.

- *The services did not discuss their concerns with other services, they dismissed the abuse as not being severe enough.*

One respondent highlighted how this impacted the victim’s ability to prove the risk the perpetrator posed.

- *None of the agencies shared the data/evidence of abuse and the impact of abuse on (my relative)... either with her, or with other agencies. Which meant, when (she) tried to prove to the courts (that) he was an abusive man, it was literally her word against his...*

Some respondents also commented on the victim’s race or cultural background affecting service or agencies response:

- *(She) completely gave up on the system she now saw as being both deeply sexist and racist.*

This is discussed further later in the report.



No one joined the dots.  
 Everyone that knew what was  
 happening just heard the information  
 and did nothing.

## SEARCHING FOR JUSTICE

The majority of respondents (87%) said there was a criminal court case following the death of their relative. 90% of these felt the prison sentences given were too short and more than half (55%) felt the voice of their relative was not represented during the criminal court process. Families also reported discrimination based on race, gender, religion and other protected characteristics. This section explores these experiences.

### Current sentences do not deliver justice

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that the length of prison sentences given were not long enough. In cases where the perpetrator received a sentence of 20 years or less, 98% felt that this was too short. Even in cases where a 20 year or more minimum term was given, 83% believed this was inadequate. Those who felt the sentence length

was too short were asked to expand on why they believed this. These respondents raised several issues, discussed below.

### 'Life' should mean life

A large number of respondents stated that as a life had been taken, the perpetrator should spend their life in prison. Some referred to the injustice they felt knowing that the perpetrator would get 'another chance.' Responses included:

- *If he does get released, he will still be young enough to start (a) family etc.*
- *When your daughter's life is taken away, why should the perpetrator still get some life?*
- *My father was sentenced to life imprisonment - I feel this was correct. However, he was out in 10 years and carried on with his life.*

Others expressed the heart-breaking life-long impact of the crime on themselves or their other relatives; comparing their ‘life sentence’ of grief and anguish to what they saw as too short a term of imprisonment for the perpetrator.

- *This man killed a mother in front of her children. They have a life sentence, he (doesn't).*
- *...My sentence is until the day I die! He took my child and grandchild and treated my daughter to hell on earth...*
- *The brutality of the attack. She was mutilated, he used overkill, and she must have been terrified. We will suffer a life sentence thinking about that, why shouldn't he. He tried to cover his tracks and lied. He is a monster and a danger to the public.*

### **A risk to society**

Worryingly, many respondents felt the sentence was too short because the perpetrator would be a danger to society, particularly other women, when not incarcerated.

- *His crime was also so brutal that I don't know how anyone who can attack someone repeatedly with a knife can be reformed and fit to go back into society.*
- *...He is now released and a danger to the community and us.*

Several families spoke about the brutality of the crimes, mentioning overkill (where excessive force or violence is used) or sadistic elements that made them

**“When your daughter’s life is taken away, why should the perpetrator still get some life?”**

believe such perpetrators would always be a risk to others. Responses included:

- *...He also searched on the web for other serial killers etc. and the police believed he would kill again...*
- *My mum was killed - stabbed (hundreds) of times. He should be in jail for the rest of his life...*

### **Sentences are not reflective of severity of crime**

It was clear that many relatives felt the sentences given did not reflect the severity of the crime committed, with several references to the brutality of the violence and the suffering or fear that the victim experienced. Others commented that committing the crime in front of children and leaving children motherless should have resulted in a longer sentence.

- *It was a brutal, cruel, violent murder. The victim must have suffered horribly. The murderer tried to cover his actions in a cold, calculating manner. He is clearly capable of enormous evil and should have been locked up for life.*
- *The perpetrator murdered my sister while their son was present.*

Several respondents also felt that the lies told after the killing, which attempted to cover up the crime or elongated anguish for family members, had not been duly taken into account.

- *The perpetrator left my mother dead in the house for... days and then pretended to be her through texts. He then went on pretending she was missing.*

### **Inequity with other homicides**

The huge discrepancy in sentencing between many domestic homicides that occur within a dwelling, and other homicides committed in a public space, was highlighted by respondents.

The starting tariff for murder where a weapon is taken to the scene of the crime is 25 years. For most other murders, the starting tariff is 15 years. This means many domestic homicides of women in the home, where a weapon is already at the scene of the crime (for example, a knife taken from the kitchen) or where the physical strength of the perpetrator is the weapon used (for example, through strangulation) the starting point for the sentencing of these crimes is 10 years less. This disparity was highlighted by respondents as the reason they believed the sentence was too short.

- *Sentencing guidelines meant that the tariff started at 15 years because the weapon was already at the place of the killing, i.e. in the home. This is ridiculous.*
- *Because the tariffs for domestic homicides are so out of step with those for 'carried knife to the scene' outdoors homicides and seem to say that the lives of these women were worth 10 years less. Insulting.*

Several respondents also felt the sentence given was shorter because the victim was a woman.

- *This perpetrator is a serious risk to women, and it would seem there lies the problem(;) a danger to women, so the crime is diminished.*

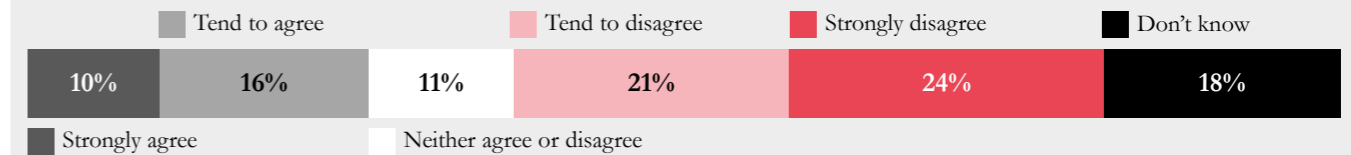
## Court processes were traumatic and did not represent the victim

There were mixed feelings related to families' experiences of the criminal and inquest proceedings, but overall responses were negative. **When asked whether they felt the voice of their relative was represented during the criminal court process, 56% of those who had gone through the process 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed' that it was.** Only 22% said they 'tended to agree' or 'strongly agreed'. Twice as many relatives rated the criminal court process overall as 'very poor' or 'fairly poor' than as 'very good' or 'fairly good' (50% vs 26%).

- *The victims' voices were unheard. Many people spoke for the perpetrator though.*
- *The defendant had his voice represented but until our victim's statements, we felt excluded. It wasn't about our daughter; it was about him.*

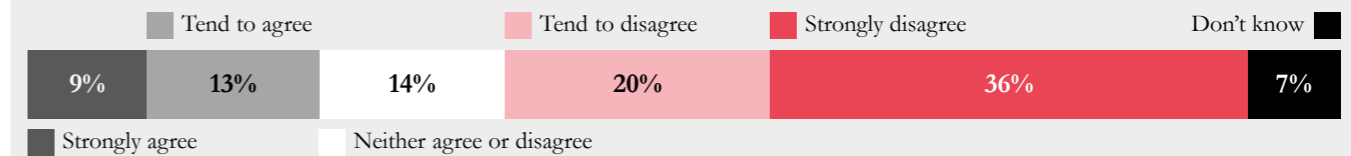
Whilst a different court process, similar views were held among those who had been through a full inquest; 45% 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed' that the voice of their relative was represented in the inquest proceedings, while only 26% said they 'tended to agree' or 'strongly agreed'.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the voice of your relative was represented during the inquest proceedings?



Base: Relatives of killed women who said there was an inquest into the death of their relative (62)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the voice of your relative was represented during the criminal court process?



Base: Relatives of killed women who said there was a criminal court case ending in a conviction for murder or manslaughter after the death of their relative (98)

When asked to expand further on their experience, families mentioned the stress and trauma of court processes. Reliving the crime is traumatic for relatives, as is having to come 'face to face' with the perpetrator as happens in the criminal trial. In addition to this many relatives reported being subjected to mistreatment, rudeness or unkindness from professionals such as lawyers and judges. There are also practical insensitivities like not being guaranteed

a seat in the gallery or only meeting the barrister just before going into the court. Several mentioned the impact of delays and the drawn-out length of time both the criminal court and inquest process can take.

- *The perpetrator admitted the killing one day after the murder, but it took the court system months to get a conviction. No regard was had for the pain this caused the family and friends of the victim.*

- *It has felt like a constant battle at every stage. There have been people that have stood up for us and fought for us, but the system is set up to make it so difficult and long. We almost gave up. So many people were defensive and just wanted to protect themselves, and not be held responsible for their part.*

Respondents reported manslaughter charges being brought when they believed a murder charge should have been brought, and other potentially criminal behaviours – such as previous abuse – going unprosecuted. One disturbing example of this was rape that had not been prosecuted, despite the existence of forensic evidence or the perpetrator admitting the crime; in these cases the perpetrator would not be registered as a sex offender if released.

Several families commented on the process allowing ‘victim-blaming’ of their loved one and that they felt the perpetrators’ needs were the priority.

- *The structure of court proceedings felt as if they catered to the needs of the perpetrator more than anyone else.*
- *(There was) Victim-blaming, her past was brought up, but not all his.*

- *The court case was a shambles of misogyny. Her name and character were vilified with no form of redress.*

There were also some more positive responses. Some families commented on individuals they felt had cared for them and provided good support.

- *We were informed throughout the whole proceeding. We met with the prosecutor numerous times, and he was very nice and listened to us as a family.*
- *The inquest was very good because the coroner was new and very interested in his job. He was fantastic with the family, and we really were truly grateful for his service.*

## A number of victims and their families experienced discrimination due to race, gender and other characteristics

Of those who identified as from an ethnic minority background (8% of the cohort) two thirds (6 of 9) said they had experienced discrimination when trying to access services because of their race. Over half of this group also felt that their relative had experienced discrimination when accessing services prior to her death because of her race. Whilst these answers came from a small cohort of respondents, they suggest a worrying prevalence of racial discrimination and highlight the additional barriers those from minority ethnic backgrounds face in accessing services.

- *“They don’t believe me because in their eyes, I’m just another brown woman with a scarf on her head”. These were the words uttered by my (relative) moments after the judge in her case called her a ‘silly woman’ and granted her abuser access to the children. Misogyny is hard to cope with as it is - being spoken down to; treated like a hysterical woman; being told off publicly for daring to state your truth. But coupled with all-too-clear racism, it makes the system feel even more abusive and cruel than it already is.*

Experiences of racism were further reported in responses across the survey, for example, when asked about why they believed the death of their loved one could have been prevented.

“ I feel my sister was written off as a **single woman with mental health problems.** ”

- *If police had listened to her in the first place and had not been so biased and racist and judgmental, she would have been alive and in my life.*

We recognise those of minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in this survey. Recognising the voices missing from our analysis is crucially important. To fill this gap we have set up a working group focused on the experiences of Black and minoritised families and are planning further research focussed on this cohort.

Some respondents also indicated either direct experiences of discrimination from services based on their gender (5%, n=6), age (4%, n=5) religion or belief (3%, n=4) or that their relative experienced discrimination due to her gender (12%, n=14) and age (4%, n=5).

When asked to expand on these or other experiences of discrimination, respondents stated they had experienced differential treatment, victim-blaming, derogatory comments, and that the risk or abuse suffered by their loved one was minimised:

- *They ignored my sisters and my plea for help. We were not taken seriously due to racism and gender.*

- *The police were sexist and treated it like 'just another domestic.'*

Nearly one in five (17%) of respondents said their loved one had a long term mental or physical disability or illness, and 17% that the victim had at least one complex need such as homelessness, mental health challenges, or addiction or substance dependency. When asked about experiences of discrimination, some respondents said their loved one had experienced discrimination because of these issues – for example, because the victim had used drugs or because they suffered mental health problems.

- *I feel my sister was written off as a single woman with mental health problems.*

Respondents who had been children at the time of their mother's homicide reported barriers to accessing the support they needed, and the severe and long-term impact of this.

7% of respondents (n=8) said that their relative had experienced so called 'honour-based' abuse. They reported a lack of understanding and training around so called 'honour-based' abuse had led to failures from services.

- *The lack of knowledge and information, training, the lack of education surrounding the circumstances "honour-based violence". They didn't do the job nowhere near how it should have been done.*
- *My loved one and myself were treated differently by most services.*

**“They don't believe me because in their eyes, I'm just another brown woman with a scarf on her head”. These were the words uttered by my (relative) moments after the judge in her case called her a 'silly woman' and granted her abuser access to the children.”**





**It has felt like a constant battle at every stage.** There have been people that have stood up for us and fought for us, but the system is set up to make it so difficult and long. We almost gave up. So many people were defensive and just wanted to protect themselves, and not be held responsible for their part.

## THE AFTERMATH

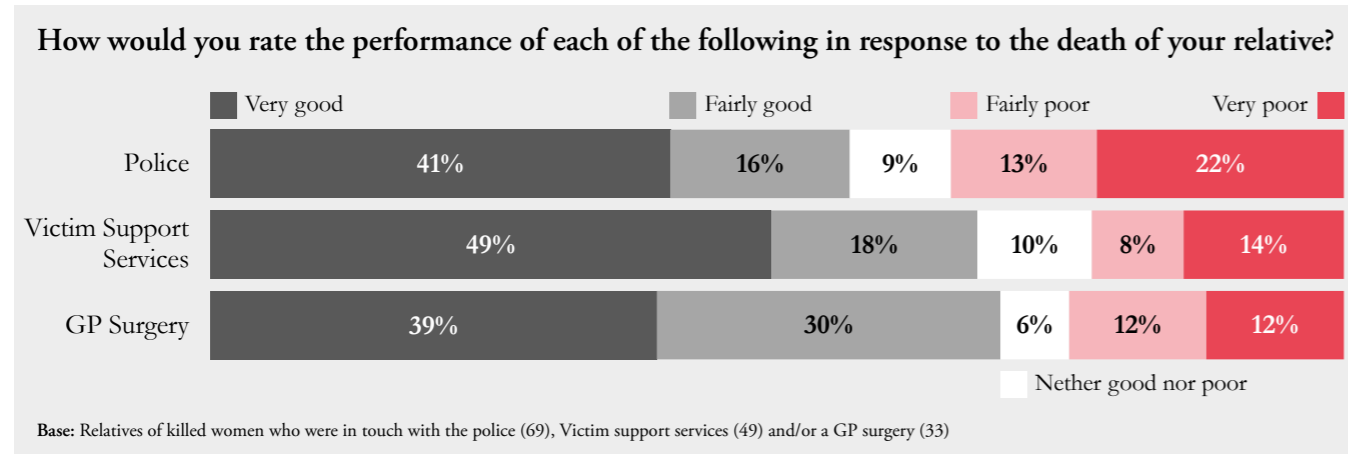
The devastation wrought by these brutal killings is far-reaching and impacts bereaved families for the rest of their lives. This section details families' experiences of how services and agencies responded to the death of their loved one; barriers and access to mental health support; financial and employment implications; and media coverage/intrusion. This section also discusses the impact of domestic homicide on children.

### Respondents felt service response after the crime was better

Relatives were in touch with a range of services following the death of their loved one including the police (60%), Victim Support services (43%), NHS mental health services (19%) and solicitors (17%). Once again there was a mixed response, but overall, respondents were fairly positive about their experience of services following the death of their loved one. **Of those who had been in touch with the police, 57% said the police were 'fairly good' or 'very good' including 41% who**

**rated the police response as 'very good'.** Victim Support services were rated highly, with 67% of respondents claiming the performance was 'very good' or 'fairly good'. The majority of respondents rated GPs, mental health services and solicitors as 'fairly good' or 'very good' (70%, 55% and 85% respectively) by respondents who had been in contact with them.

- *Our FLO's (Family Liaison Officers) were exceptional. They got very involved, with us, our daughter; we could trust them completely, felt that they would do anything for us.*
- *Victim Support assigned us a homicide case worker who supported us through the first year of losing our relative. They exceeded in their role, and we were incredibly grateful for their support.*



One respondent highlighted the difference they felt existed between how the police had responded before, and after, their relative’s death.

- *Ironically, it was only after my relative's murder that the police seemed to finally do the job of caring for/anticipating need. But of course, it all came too late.*

Whilst a small number of respondents had been in contact with specialist services/charities for domestic abuse (n=12), mental health (n=5) or organisations run by and for specific groups (e.g. disabled women, victims of honour-based violence or Black or minoritised women)(n=4), the performance was

generally rated highly. For example, 83% (10 of the 12) of respondents who had contacted voluntary, or charity domestic abuse agencies/support services rated their support as ‘very good’. There were also several mentions of specialist services such as Southall Black Sisters, Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse and SAMM (Support After Murder and Manslaughter) providing essential support.

However, some respondents had negative experiences, and described services, or individuals within services, they felt had failed them. For example, relatives’ assessment of the family courts was primarily negative and mental health support was inconsistent. This is discussed further in the next section.

## Mental health support was varied

Respondents commented on the devastating impact that the loss of their loved one had on their mental health. When asked whether they had access to any form of mental health or grief services, 31% said they had accessed NHS mental health services; 30% peer to peer support groups; 24% private mental health services; and 21% services provided by a charity. A third (33%), however, said they had not accessed any service.

When asked to expand on experiences of grief or trauma support, the response was varied. Some had found counselling or therapeutic support incredibly helpful, praising the individuals that had supported them.

- *So far in... I have had 2 therapists... I absolutely appreciate the service I have received. [It's] funded by charity and private[ly]. I don't know where I would be if I didn't have that support. To begin with I could barely talk at all. I was crying two-thirds of the time. Time is definitely a healer. Doesn't take the pain and anguish away, but it helps. The most support has been from a woman's support group, mostly charity funded.*

“Ironically, it was only **after my relative’s murder** that the police seemed to finally do the job of caring for / anticipating need. But of course, it all came too late.”

“It’s been hard financially and any savings we had are long gone. It was not the retirement my husband and I planned, but we did what we had to do, which was be there for our grandchildren.”

- *Again, my counsellor was amazing, but I understand so few people get that.*

However, some also questioned how effective their provision had been, and many mentioned difficulties in accessing support at all. Several of those that did access help commented that it did not last long enough.

- *I received some very good support, but it probably wasn't for a long enough period.*
- *Grief is a life-long process in these circumstances, it seems that you are expected to get over it sooner than you can.*

The importance of support from family and friends was also highlighted by respondents.

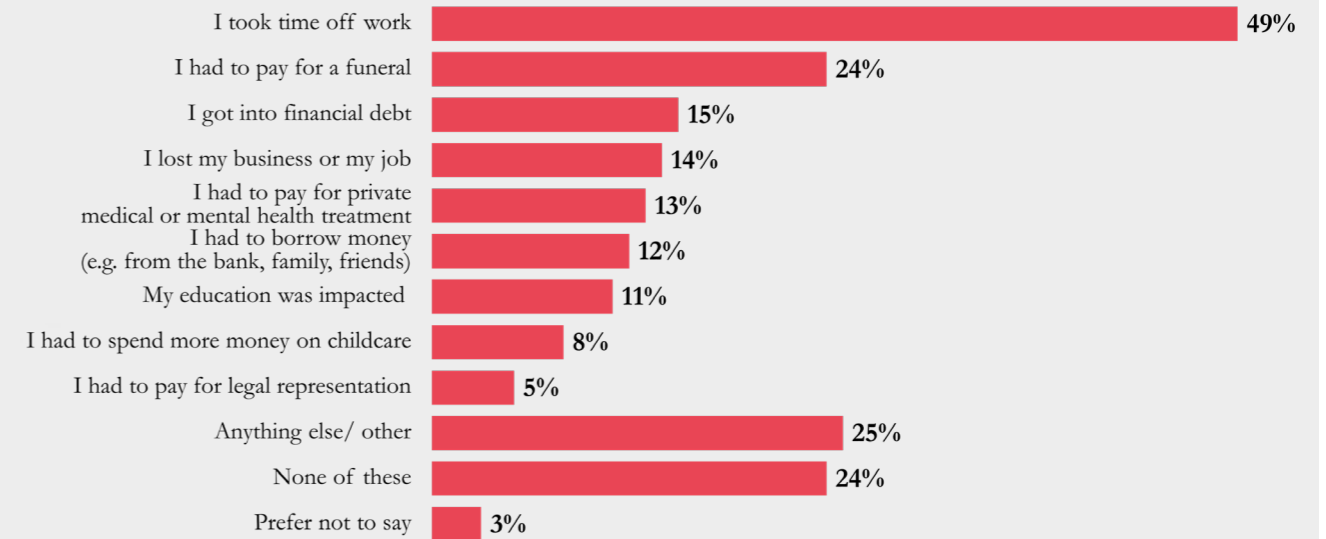
- *My local community and family were vital and provided most of the support.*
- *Our friends and family were crucial, even though they were grieving too.*

## Respondents suffered wide ranging and negative financial impact

The financial implications for relatives were varied and wide-reaching. **A quarter (24%) had to pay for funerals, 15% got into debt and 12% had to borrow money.** Respondents also recorded having to cover court process costs, private therapy, and childcare for children they became responsible for following the mother’s death, including family court costs.

- *It’s been hard financially and any savings we had are long gone. It was not the retirement my husband and I planned, but we did what we had to do, which was be there for our grandchildren.*
- *Because murder impacts so much on everyone in a family, costs are complex i.e. I indulged my kids to help them cope and still do. We all suffered so much, I lost a business and I had to take time out from a Masters, how I finally managed it, I don't know...*

Which, if any of the following things happened to you as a result of the death of your relative?



Base: Relatives of killed women (115).

- *We had to pay for family court representation, but he got Legal Aid. That is shameful.*

Some costs could be claimed back, but families reported this was limited and not always straightforward.

- *Costs are also incurred as part of the trial process. There is a limit that can be claimed back and if it is a lengthy trial, this limit can be easily exceeded.*

Half of relatives (49%) took time off work and 14% lost their business or job, while others commented on the impact the trauma had on their education.

- *I got support with [the] cost of a solicitor but had to contribute to this. I also went down to half pay due to how much time off I had/have, so had to run up debt on credit cards.*
- *I have been heavily financially impacted.... I still feel that I can only work part-time and am currently looking for paid work. It has been another great loss.*

Some respondents felt they had to return to work too soon for financial reasons.

- *I had a month off work which was a financial strain. I wasn't ready to go back to work but felt I had no choice as I couldn't afford to be off any longer.*

Other respondents reported more positive experiences with their employers being incredibly supportive and allowing time off work.

- *...My employer was fully supportive of any time I needed to be away from my workplace.*
- *No lost income due to time off work, as my employers were very supportive and understanding.*

## Relatives found the media intrusive and traumatising

Around three in five (57%) respondents experienced unwanted or negative media coverage or intrusion after the death of their relative. When asked to expand, respondents mentioned coverage that had made them feel anxious or upset, media outlets getting information and details about the crime or their loved one wrong, and victim-blaming and sensationalising.

- *The local paper ran a story pretty much saying my (relative) brought her murder upon herself as she... wanted to leave her husband.*

Many families mentioned how persistent the media could be, even when the family had requested to be left alone. Families felt anxious to leave the house and worried about what they might read.

- *They constantly harassed my family and still do to this day.*
- *We had press at the door and waiting on the road which was very upsetting and distressing.*
- *(It was) hard to see my mum's face on the front of newspapers.*
- *It was very hard for the children to see all the coverage of the murder and we did have to hide from the press. The older child was hounded by magazines to tell her story...*

There was also a concern about information that they could not control being accessible to anyone, particularly with regards to children of the victim.

- *Calls and press knocking the door was awful. Facebook news posting stories, and seeing comments, and the local newspaper printing stories that were untrue, was very upsetting. I think about the children reading it in years to come. There was no way of stopping it.*

More positively, several families also mentioned how coverage allowed them to share their experiences or raise awareness.

- *We wanted everyone to know what had happened.*

“They constantly harassed my family and still do to this day.”

## Children and domestic homicide

Around half (45%) of respondents reported their relative had a child at the time of their death.

Horribly, 21% of respondents said a child was killed at the same time as their mother.

The destruction of these young lives is devastating, and the frequency with which a child and a mother are killed together demands urgent attention. This section of the report looks at the impact of homicide on children.

“Horribly, 21% of respondents said a child was killed at the same time as their mother.”

## Respondents were critical of the family courts and custody process after the homicide

60% of respondents who were in contact with family courts after the death of their relative rated their performance as poor.

- *Family courts were a joke. They were always more concerned about what the perpetrator wanted for the children. We had to fight to keep the children with us.*

A third (33%) of respondents who said their relative had a child under 18 at the time of the homicide, reported the children had gone into the care of social services or into foster care following the death. Respondents spoke about the heartbreak of being separated from their nieces, nephews or grandchildren after the homicide, and the damaging actions of children's social services and the family courts on both the deceased's children and themselves.

- *The children were whisked away by the police from their school on the day of their mother's murder and put into foster care immediately. No contact was allowed (for) months – a fact and a rift we still have not healed from. No information was given to us about where or how they were...*

- *It has been hell in the family courts and children's social services. We did not see (the) children for months as they were sucked into the social care system. I can't even begin to tell you the pain for us in not seeing them, and the murder they have suffered. Yet no one listened to us. We wanted to look after and love them as we should do, but the fight to make that happen went on and on - they listened to him in prison rather than us. He was still part of the process even though he killed their mother. How the services and family courts treated us, and the kids was abusive. It must change.*

Of respondents that said their loved one had a child, 58% reported the perpetrator was the father of the children, and 58% of these said the perpetrator became involved in child custody or care proceedings following the crime. Astonishingly, the law allows perpetrators to remain involved in custody proceeding even following a murder conviction, and families highlighted the ongoing trauma this caused.

- *The perpetrator still has parental rights by law meaning he was involved in all child court proceedings even after murdering their mother. The perpetrator denied our family from fostering my relative's children resulting in them ending up in foster care.*

We also heard reflections from respondents who were children at the time of their mother's death, who felt the preparators were prioritised.

- *My father maintained custody and we went back to live with him after [he served] a sentence and no support was offered to myself or my brother.*
- *...My father's rights came before mine... The horrific murder of my mum was committed in front of me by him and yet he still got to rule over my life despite taking everything from me.*

There has recently been a commitment from government to change this law and remove parental rights from those who kill their partners.

## Lack of access to support for children

Of respondents that said their loved one had a child, 40% said the care and support from services for children after their mother had been killed was 'poor' or 'fairly poor', compared with 24 % who said 'good' or 'fairly good'. One in eight (16%) said they had not received any support from services or agencies.

Respondents expressed barriers to support for children in the aftermath of the homicide of their mother – particularly access to grief or trauma support.

- *There was nowhere near enough available mental health support, and it only lasted so long. As a family (we) had to do it all, as she grew up the grief changed. There was no ongoing support, which we needed.*

Again, it was distressing to hear from those who were children of victims, and who felt they had not had access to the support, care or services they needed. 16% of respondents were the children of the victim, some of them under 18 when their mother was killed.

- *I wish I had received mental health / bereavement support following my mum's death.*

Some expressed feeling there was no one to advocate for them, and limited access to information or support due to their age.

- *Because I was a child no one offered me support, I had no idea I could have support.*

Some respondents highlighted the devastating impact it had on their development; difficulties in schooling and negative impact on education; and the lifelong struggle to access support.

- *My school didn't have any mental health support at the time... I was high functioning... the strain on me wasn't really recognised. I messed up my exams because I couldn't handle the stress of the situation - my later work with a Victim Support counsellor... suggested I had PTSD which wasn't on anyone's radar at the time.*
- *Being ignored and neglected by society after my mother's murder had as much an impact on my life as her murder itself.*

Being ignored and neglected by society after my mother's murder had as much an impact on my life as her murder itself.

# CONCLUSIONS

This report is shaped by the experiences and testimonies of bereaved families torn apart by male violence. For them, its findings come too late. No recommendations laid out here can bring their loved one back; no conclusions drawn can ease the injustice and trauma of violence that they endure every day. But with extraordinary courage they have shared their voices, and the voice of their loved ones, to try and protect someone else.

This report has exposed three key areas of failure:

- 1 Failure to intervene to prevent killings, even when warnings were given.**
- 2 Failure to provide justice to victims.**
- 3 Failure to support bereaved families when they needed it the most.**

The current system fails to intervene before these brutal crimes happen; then responds to them with inadequate sentencing and a criminal justice process that diminishes the lives of those taken and belittles the broader impact of VAWG on society.

Underpinning these systemic failures is a culture that has viewed these terrible crimes against women as something unfortunate but unavoidable, to be accepted and expected. They are not.

We believe there are three urgent priorities for reform.

## Prioritisation of prevention.

This report is clear; the crimes these families have faced are the brutal consequences of inaction. Many of the killers had a long record of violence and abuse, some had even killed before. Even more worryingly, in the vast majority of cases (78%) where there was previous abuse against the victim, at least one service or agency knew that they were being abused but didn't act to stop it.

We need a fundamental shift in our approach to VAWG that concentrates focus and resource on preventing these crimes from happening in the first place, rather than just responding to them in the aftermath. For some crimes - like terrorism - police and policy are already consistently focused on disruption and prevention. We should have the same expectation here.

Such a shift will require significant police and criminal justice reform, but it will need to go much further than this. It will require wholesale reform of how agencies such as the NHS, our education system, social services, children's services and employers' approach VAWG. It will also mean addressing the underlying misogynistic attitudes that enable and promote violence against women and girls through education and actively tackling those who promote misogynistic violence.

To underpin this approach and ensure accountability for it, we ask government to commit to specific annual targets to bring down the number of women killed by men and to commit to shifting their approach to one centred on prevention.

## Legal system reform

Our sentencing framework and criminal justice response must demonstrate an absolute intolerance to the killing of women. At present it doesn't. Instead it demonstrates shocking double standards whereby murderers who use a knife found at the scene of a crime (such as from a kitchen) often receive a ten year lower starting tariff than murderers who take a weapon to the scene. 70% of women are killed in the home<sup>7</sup> - why should some of these killers receive shorter sentences? There are many other examples of injustice and inequity in the system.

Why should such intimate crimes - being murdered in the sanctity of one's home by a partner or former partner, or by another family relative - lead to shorter sentences? In our view there is no reason other than a culture of misogyny that has traditionally excused such crimes as acts of passion, or just 'domestics'. Every killed woman, every victim of femicide, deserves justice.

<sup>7</sup> [www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf](http://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf)

Government should commit to ending the current injustice in sentencing and reforming the criminal justice system to ensure perpetrators are held accountable for the crimes committed and the risk to society they pose.

## Access to support

In the aftermath of this violence, the families left behind must have access to the support their agony deserves, recognising the life long and devastating impact of homicide.

In the fog of trauma, these families are thrust into brutal legal processes, and face long term mental health issues, financial difficulties, and a traumatic and intrusive onslaught from the media. Whilst some receive good care and support from services and individuals; the reality is that many find themselves struggling to access the full breadth of support they need. This is seen most clearly in how severely children who lose their mothers are failed, their fates seemingly treated as little more than an afterthought. The state's failure to respond and provide for families in the aftermath of homicide further compound the message that these crimes, these lives, don't matter.

There must be a root and branch review of the support system available to families who have had a loved one killed, this must include a particular focus of how children are supported both in the immediate aftermath and the longer term.

None of these recommendations will bring back the women whose voices and stories are represented in this report. But if their voices are finally listened to - and the strategic shifts to policy are implemented seriously and comprehensively - they will prevent many future deaths.

For centuries violence against women and girls was tolerated, seen as inevitable. It has been excused and deprioritised by successive governments, the police, the legal establishment, and society as a whole. It is welcome news that that rhetoric has now changed. Now we need policy to change along with it.

## Contact

Website: [www.killedwomen.org/thereport](http://www.killedwomen.org/thereport)

Email: [info@killedwomen.org](mailto:info@killedwomen.org)

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