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WEBWATCH

Bereaved by homicide

Amanda Aitken BA PGCE DipCouns

Counsellor, Torbay Social Services, Devon, UK

THERE WERE 1,130 HOMICIDES in the UK during 2004-5; in the USA the annual figure is estimated at 45,000. Around the world, thousands of people are bereaved each year by the murder or manslaughter of a loved one.

Despite this, internet resources are still relatively limited and tend to be housed on sites concerned with a variety of issues rather than homicide exclusively. One such website is that of the UK charity **Victim Support** at www.victimsupport.org.uk which provides emotional support and information for anyone affected by crime. The site has a section for each country in the UK, and for the Republic of Ireland, as there are national variations in the criminal justice system. In fact much information is duplicated.

In the England and Wales subsite there is a section dedicated to specific crimes, including murder or manslaughter (click on **Help for Victims** and scroll down to Related Topics). Here is practical information on the criminal justice system, claiming compensation against the offender, the role of the coroner and links to several main UK bereavement sites, including **Cruse** which handles many long-term cases of bereavement by homicide. There is also helpful information in this section for **children and their parents** with links to UK services including **Childline**, the **NSPCC** and **Kidscape**. The site also gives details of its **Witness Support Service** providing emotional and practical support to adult and child witnesses, including court visits before giving evidence, and information about court procedures.

Anyone working with homicide bereavement in the rest of Europe may wish to access similar organisations via the **European Forum for Victim Services** available at www.euvictimservices.org. Founded in 1990, there are 15 European countries affiliated to the Forum including France, Germany, and Switzerland. Website addresses and telephone numbers for all organisations are available from the Forum website.

One UK organisation which deals exclusively with homicide and manslaughter is **SAMM (Support After Murder and**

Homicide), available at www.samm.org.uk. As well as organising self-help support, this charity encourages research into the devastating effects of homicide and aims to increase society's awareness of these problems, mainly by providing training to agencies, including the police, and information to the media. Working with the Home Office, SAMM has produced a **Homicide Information Pack** for relatives of victims. Site users can register to receive this and SAMM's **newsletter** and to check the availability of local groups but, sadly, apart from some contact details the website lacks resources. The organisation obviously has a wealth of information on this kind of bereavement. A pity, then, that more is not available online.

The **National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children** is at www.pomc.com. Although specifically for bereaved parents, this USA-based website includes some useful resources for those working with homicide. Membership takes the form of attending meetings and/or telephone and mail contact. Bereavement professionals are welcome to join and the organisation can also provide training for those working in areas such as mental health, social work and community services.

Of particular interest are the articles under the section **Legal/Professional** accessible from the home page. Included here are **Tips from Survivors**, a comprehensive list of points found helpful by bereaved people when receiving the death notification and identifying the body of the person who has died. **Information for Doctors and Nurses** gives a useful outline of best practice when dealing with the bereaved.

Another article here, **Information for Professionals**, suggests ways to help and factors that can hinder. Since lack of accurate information can lead to even greater distress for the bereaved, a link here enables site users to email questions directly to a team of experts including doctors, a pathologist, a bereavement specialist and legal experts. All questions and responses are posted on the website and accessible to all site users. ●