



Relatives of victims of serious assault: Implications for policy and practice

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VISION

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Overview

- Effects of interpersonal violence and abuse are far-reaching and long-lasting
- For every victim, there is in many cases *at least* one relative
- However, very little attention given to families as victims in their own right
- *What does it mean to view a family member as a 'victim' – and to include them in victim policy, research and practice?*



estimates suggest, on average,
a homicide affects **7-10 family
members and friends**
(Redmond, 1989)



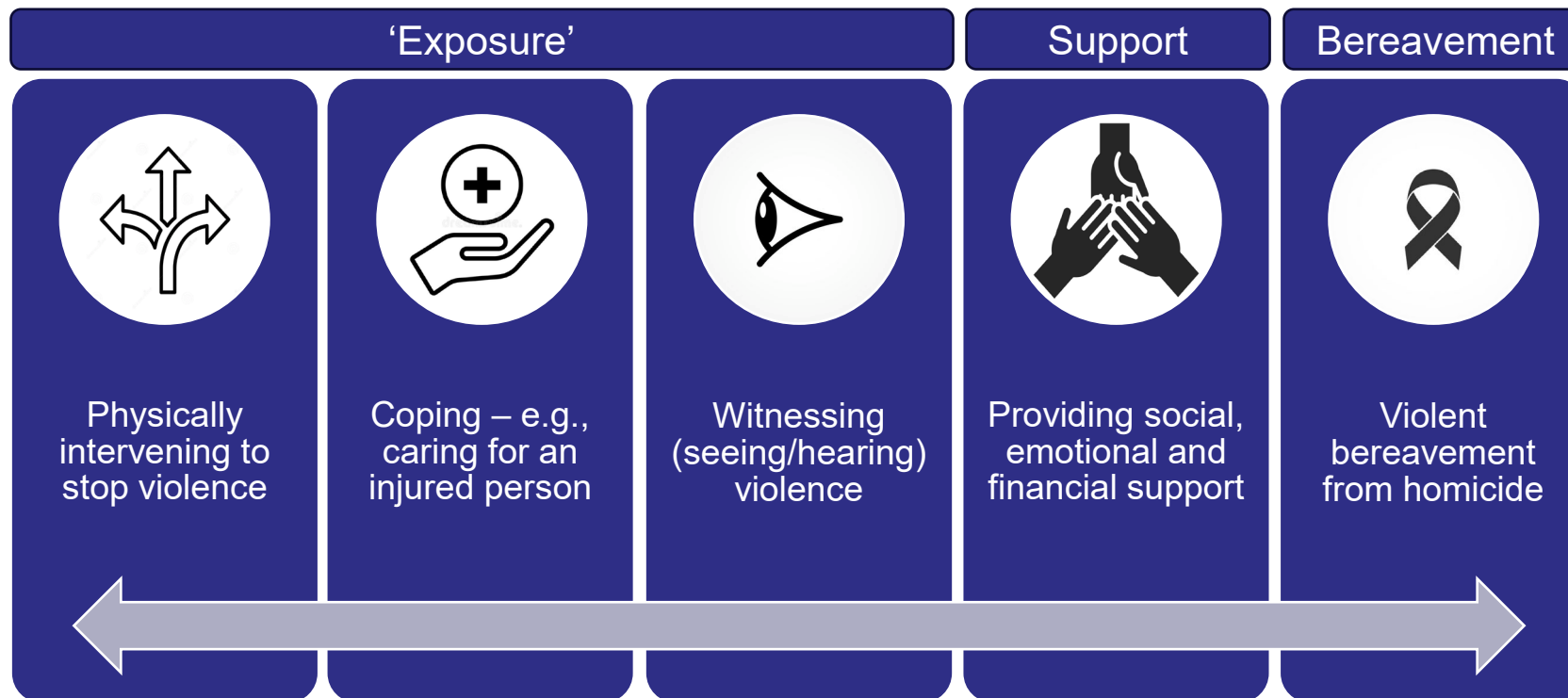
Terminology

Terms used to position relatives in relation to violence

- Indirect or vicarious victims
- Collateral victims
- Secondary victims
- Co-victims or corollary victims
- Included in policy as a victim, **if**:
 - They are persons who have “seen, heard, or otherwise directly experienced the effects of, criminal conduct at the time the conduct occurred” (*Victims and Prisoners Bill, 2023*)
 - They are “a close relative (see glossary) of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence” (Ministry of Justice, 2015 - *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*)

What do we know?

About relatives of victims of serious assault





Evidence gap

- Differentiating between levels of exposure (intervene, see/hear, being harmed by violence targeted at another, increased caring responsibilities)
- How 'exposure' to violence can co-occur alongside other major adversities
- The association of being a relative of a victim with mental health outcomes





Methodology

- Secondary analysis of the 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS)
- Weighted descriptive analyses; multivariable logistic regressions adjusted for gender, age, marital status, tenure, area-level deprivation, and whether participant was a victim of violence
- Aims:
 - To estimate of what proportion of the population was closely related to a victim of a serious assault; and,
 - To assess whether this is associated with higher rates of feeling unsafe, depression and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress, self-harm and suicidality.





Results (I):

Who are the relatives of serious assault victims?

- In 2014, around 1 in 20 adults (4.5%, 95% CI: 4.0-5.2, n=345) was closely related to a serious assault victim
- Relatives of serious assault victims were more likely to be:
 - younger
 - live in social housing
 - live in the most deprived neighbourhoods
 - **to be a victim of serious assault themselves**
 - experience multiple types of adversity in their lives



Results (II)

Is being the relative of a serious assault victim associated with mental health?

- Relatives of serious assault victims were:
 - 4x more likely to feel unsafe in their neighbourhood
 - 2x as likely to:
 - have depression or an anxiety disorder;
 - screen positive for post-traumatic stress disorder;
 - report suicidal thoughts, self-harm, attempted suicide in the past year.
- After adjusting for relatives' **own** experience of serious assault and other factors:
 - association with PTSD and suicidality *no longer* significant
 - association with feeling unsafe (aOR 2.36 95%CI: 1.26-4.44) and with depression and anxiety (aOR 1.37; 0.99-1.90) remained.





However...

How people interpret 'serious' assault matters

- Reliance on subjective interpretations of:
 - **'serious assault'**:
 - Likely to be gendered
 - Likely to be interpreted as physical rather than non-physical;
 - **'close relative'**:
 - By blood, law, extended kinship (also fictive kin).
- Initial disclosure of the assault to a family member





Implications

For support services:

- Relatives of victims likely to have had their own experiences of serious assault *and* already experiencing heightened stress, anxiety and depression in a context of reduced resources;
- Inclusion means likely increased demand and scale, as well as adapting services to cope with poly-victimization.

For policy makers:

- Inclusion in economic estimates of the costs of violence?
- Current proposed legal definition of a ‘victim’ (i.e., Victims and Prisoners Bill) excludes relatives (with some important exceptions).



Thank you! Questions?

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	Unadjusted odds ratios (OR)				1: Each model adjusted for demographics, socioeconomics ^a				2: Each model further adjusted being direct victim of violence ^b				3: Each model further adjusted for range of other adversities ^c			
Outcomes	OR	Lower CI	Upper CI	p-value	aOR	Lower CI	Upper CI	p-value	aOR	Lower CI	Upper CI	p-value	aOR	Lower CI	Upper CI	p-value
1. Feel unsafe in local area	4.07	2.40	6.89	<0.001	3.39	1.93	5.95	<0.001	3.44	1.82	6.50	<0.001	2.36	1.26	4.44	0.008
2. CMD in past week	2.40	1.79	3.21	<0.001	2.19	1.62	2.95	<0.001	1.42	1.03	1.97	0.033	1.37	0.99	1.90	0.060
3. PTSD positive	2.43	1.69	3.49	<0.001	2.19	1.50	3.21	<0.001	1.29	0.87	1.91	0.208	1.34	0.88	2.05	0.177
4. Self-harm in past year	2.54	1.35	4.80	0.004	2.33	1.21	4.48	0.012	1.49	0.65	3.41	0.341	1.11	0.54	2.26	0.784
5. Suicidal thoughts in past year	2.42	1.59	3.67	<0.001	2.27	1.46	3.54	<0.001	1.56	0.96	2.52	0.073	1.36	0.85	2.19	0.200
6. Suicide attempt in past year	3.10	1.26	7.64	0.014	2.87	1.13	7.31	0.027	1.57	0.67	3.66	0.294	1.36	0.54	3.46	0.515