

Ohioans to Stop Executions

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://otse.org/murder-victims-family-members>

Campaign and Advocacy

[Ohioans to Stop Executions](#)

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Justice is often defined by people outside of the crime (prosecutors, judges, etc.). The definition, often aligned with a death sentence, usually ends up causing more harm than good for the victims family members (co-victims) due to the lengthy nature of death penalty cases. Each trial forces the family to re-live the trauma that may have occurred decades ago due to the lengthy nature of capital punishment cases.

Because of this, the death penalty does not statistically provide closure for family members of the victim. [Research by University of Minnesota sociology-anthropology professor Scott Vollum and colleagues](#) found ambivalence in co-victims reactions to capital punishment. Their study showed that only 2.5 percent achieved true closure, and 20.1 percent said that the execution did not help them heal. Co-victims in the study also expressed feelings of emptiness when the death penalty did not bring back the victim.

Damage to Inmates Family:

The impact of the execution on the inmates family can go on and on for many years, even until the family members own deaths. Below are three examples from Radelets study of how family members of the inmate experience suffering pre and post execution:

- 1) Guilt:** The study notes how its not uncommon for families to second-guess their own past decisions and behavior that may have contributed to the loved ones criminality. They continuously ask the question of could I have done more to help?
- 2) Anger:** Anger, toward the loved one or others involved in the trial, is also common.
- 3) Shame and Isolation.** Family members tend to be isolated and invisible to the public. No politicians mention their names in their campaigns, very few advocacy groups are concerned with their needs, and there is little public recognition or concern for their situation.

Once the inmate is executed, he is dead. Whatever the retributive impact of imprisonment and execution is on the inmate, it is over. The inmates family, however, continues to suffer. All of us can think about our inevitable deaths, but we can never reflect back on them. Our survivors will and do, and in cases where the death is as traumatic and stigmatized as state executions, living with the aftermath quite often brings special miseries that differ both qualitatively and quantitatively from those experienced by family members of those serving LWOP sentences

A [2012 Marquette University Law School study](#) showed improved physical and psychological health for co-victims, as well as greater satisfaction with the justice system, when life sentences were given, rather than capital punishment. The authors hypothesize that survivors may prefer the finality of a life sentence and the obscurity into which the defendant will quickly fall, to the continued uncertainty and publicity of the death penalty.

In these cases, victims family members are the only people qualified to talk about justice and what they need to heal.

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