

Minister Flanagan announces independent specialist in-depth research study on familicide and domestic homicide reviews

- *Study will be led by Norah Gibbons with support from a specialist team*
- *Study to be completed and make recommendations in 12 months*

14 May 2019

Following the Government meeting today, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD, has announced that he is commissioning an independent specialist in-depth research study focussing on two pillars:

- i. the provision of supports to families who are victims of familicide; and
- ii. international best practice in the conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Ms Norah Gibbons has been appointed by Minister Flanagan to lead the study. She will be joined by a small team of experts. The study will involve consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including State agencies, family members of victims and non-governmental organisations.

The Minister urged those who have lost loved ones in familicide to input into the study, saying: **“It is important that those who have experienced this unimaginable loss engage with this study. I took great care in choosing the right person to lead this study. Norah Gibbons not only brings experience and expertise, she also brings great humanity and compassion to this important and sensitive study. Over the years Norah has established a track record of effectively leading collaboratively in dealing with sensitive issues in both the voluntary and state sector, as well as of cross-State agency work.”**

The first pillar of the study, dealing with familicide, will examine the adequacy and suitability of current policies, protocols, procedures and practices of state services in supporting close family members of those who die in familicides – and make recommendations.

Minister Flanagan said: **“While Familicide is relatively rare in Ireland, these horrific events have a devastating impact on those left behind, both family members and the wider community. I want to ensure that clear protocols and guidelines are in place so that the State can provide all appropriate supports – and do so in a coordinated and timely manner.”**

The second pillar of the study will examine international best practice in respect of domestic homicide reviews in order to make recommendations in relation to their application in this jurisdiction.

The Minister added: **“Domestic Homicide Reviews have taken place for a number of years in England and Wales. These reviews are important in determining the effectiveness of interventions to protect victims and inform policy responses. In my engagement with NGOs, it became clear that the UK model cannot be directly transposed to Ireland but would need to be tailored for this jurisdiction. This study will define international best practice and identify how these reviews might apply in Ireland.”**

The study will also consider how the media report on familicide and make recommendations on best practice, as well as how social media deals with such events. The terms of reference for the study were informed by consultations with, among others, victims and a number of non-governmental organisations. Minister Flanagan expressed his sincere thanks to all those who had helped inform the terms of reference for the study.

Ms. Gibbons will be free to recommend any course of action which she considers appropriate and has been asked to provide a report to the Minister within 12 months of commencing work, or as soon as possible thereafter. The necessary resources (accommodation, administrative support etc.) are currently being secured with a view to the work of the group commencing as soon as possible.

People may approach the office directly or through an NGO. Further public announcements inviting people to come forward will be made in due course.

ENDS

Note for Editors:

Biography of Norah Gibbons

Ms Norah Gibbons is a qualified social worker and has significant practical experience in both Ireland and the UK.

Among the many important roles she has undertaken, Ms Gibbons was a member of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (2000-2009), chaired the Roscommon Child Abuse Inquiry (2009-2010) and co-chaired the Independent Review Group on Child Deaths (2010-2012). She was also the first Chairperson of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency(2014-2018), and Director of Advocacy with Barnardos (2005-2012) and was a member of the Acknowledgement Forum of the Historical Abuse Inquiry in Northern Ireland (2012-2015).

A Study on Familicide, Domestic Homicide Reviews and Related Matters Purpose and Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Minister for Justice and Equality is commissioning a study focussed on two pillars – (A) Familicide and (B) Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Familicide, where a perpetrator murders a number of close family members in quick succession, and may also commit suicide is relatively rare in Ireland. When familicide does occur, this harrowing crime is devastating for survivors and can surface complex issues, including those of a practical nature, for all the parties concerned.

The Minister believes that it is necessary to establish appropriate protocols and guidelines to govern such cases. The development of these protocols and guidelines is to be underpinned by this study.

The related area of domestic homicide, where a person is killed by a current/former partner or close family member, is generally a crime with particular features which require careful analysis.

Domestic Homicide Reviews have taken place for a number of years in England and Wales and involve “a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship, or a member of the same household as themselves” (as defined by the UK Home Office).

Terms of Reference

Pillar A: Familicide

Meeting the Future Support Needs of Family Members

1. To consult and consider the experiences of close family members of those who die in familicides, in relation to their experiences in the aftermath and their support needs, particularly with reference to the period from the start of the year 2000 to date. Such consultation may only take place in cases where all legal processes have been completed.
2. To consider the adequacy and suitability of current policies, protocols, procedures and practices of state services in supporting close family members of those who die in familicides (where all legal processes are completed) and to make recommendations.

Methodology

3. To draw on relevant peer-reviewed research.
4. To consult with the close family members of victims of familicide.
5. To consider the ways in which support services are delivered in other comparable jurisdictions and identify successful practices which might be helpful to those affected in Ireland.
6. To consider how to develop an integrated procedure to support close family members of those who die in familicides in the most competent, caring, effective and efficient way in the future.
7. To consider the range of supports which should be provided, in the immediate, short and long terms, to local communities impacted by such crimes.

8. To take account of the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, the Coroners Act 1962, as amended, and the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland for the establishment of Crisis Intervention Teams.
9. The following state agencies and other stakeholders should be consulted:
 - a. An Garda Síochána.
 - b. Acute hospitals including accident and emergency departments.
 - c. GPs through the Irish College of General Practitioners.
 - d. The Probation Service.
 - e. The Royal College of Physicians in Ireland, Faculty of Pathologists.
 - f. Tusla.
 - g. The Coroners Service.
 - h. Irish College of Psychiatry.
 - i. The Mental Health Commission and mental health services as appropriate.
 - j. The Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board.
 - k. National Educational Psychological Services and, where appropriate school management.
 - l. The National Suicide Research Foundation.
 - m. The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention and HSE Regional Officers for Suicide Prevention.
 - n. Any other state service, which has a significant role in supporting family members or NGOs providing services under contract by a state agency.
 - o. Any other relevant agencies or NGOs.

The Role of the Media

10. To consider, in consultation with the Press Ombudsman, The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the National Union of Journalists, Headline (Ireland's national programme for responsible reporting and representation of mental illness and suicide), Samaritans Ireland and any other relevant bodies, how the media report on such events, and make recommendations on best practice.
11. To consider how social media deals with such events, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and make recommendations on how to progress this issue.

Requested Outcomes

12. The objective is that, on completion of this study, a series of recommendations will provide for enhanced information and supportive arrangements to the family members of victims of familicide and others affected by these harrowing crimes.
13. The identification, if possible, of potential warning signs and possible responses/actions including the development of protocols to allow relevant information to be shared by professionals or with family members.
14. The development of clear protocols by state agencies and other agencies and individuals for sharing information with immediate family members

15. The development of an emergency team protocol which would bring together key officials as soon as possible after an incident to review information known at the time, identify agencies who might hold relevant files, and crucially, identify what supports are needed by family and community and whom is best placed to provide this.

Pillar B: Identifying International Best Practice in Domestic Homicide Reviews

The second pillar of the research should address the issue of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Methodology

16. To draw on relevant peer-reviewed research.
17. To consult with the close family members of victims.
18. To consult with NGOs working in this field.
19. To consult with appropriate experts, state agencies and any other agency/organisation in jurisdictions with experience of domestic homicide reviews in comparable foreign jurisdictions.
20. The following state agencies and other stakeholders should be consulted:
 - An Garda Síochána
 - The Probation Service.
 - Tusla.
 - The Mental Health Commission and mental health services as appropriate.
 - The Mental Health (Criminal Law) Review Board.
 - Acute hospitals including accident and emergency departments.
 - Any other state service or relevant agencies.

Requested outcome

21. To identify international best practice in respect of domestic homicide reviews and to make recommendations in relation to their application to this jurisdiction.

Practical Arrangements

22. Both pillars of the study will be led by an experienced suitably qualified person and appropriate experts will be contracted to assist the lead person.
23. The study will be submitted to the Minister for Justice and Equality within twelve months or as soon as possible thereafter and will be published.

Ends