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Double murders unusual in Iowa

Christoph Trappe The Gazette

Losing a brother and niece in a 1998 double murder has been difficult, said Pearl Shanda, 62, of Cedar Rapids. "It was like being hit by a ton of bricks," Shanda said. "Two people in your life were no longer there. It was one of the most devastating things I've ever been through."

David "D.J." Tomlinson Jr., now 32 and an inmate at the Anamosa prison, was convicted in the shotgun slayings of his father, David Tomlinson Sr., 52, and his sister Angela Miell, 26, at his father's home in Tama on May 22, 1998.

Multiple-victim murder cases - like the one that devastated Shanda and Sunday's slaying of two 18-year-old women in Cedar Rapids - are rare in Iowa, state

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Murders/Support can help survivors

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crime records show.

In 2004, three of the state's 42 murder cases had two victims, according to the Iowa Department of Public Safety.

Emily Blomme, director of the Cedar Rapids-based Survivors Program, said double murders are "probably more intense. (You are) not just grieving the death and future of one person, but you are doing that for two people."

In many cases, the victims knew each other or are related.

The two women killed Sunday in Cedar Rapids, Molly Edmondson and Katrina Hill, were cousins.

Shanda said it's not going to be easy for the women's survivors. "They have to hold on to their faith," she said. "I know they are going to have a lot of anger. The anger will pass with time. They will need a lot of support."

Faith and support helped her get through that traumatic time in her life, Shanda said.

So did attending survivor programs put on by Blomme's group, she said.

"If you started crying for no reason, they knew what you went through," she said. "You could be yourself."

The last double murder before Sunday's in Cedar Rapids happened in 2003. Jay Grahlman, 38, and his daughter, Jaymie, 6, died from injuries suffered in a fire at their home in April of that year. Brian Zirtzman was charged in the case but acquitted.

Iowa City's last double homicide happened in 1999.

Jonathan Memmer, 30, was convicted in the murders of Laura Watson-Dalton and Maria Lehner in an Iowa City apartment building. He's serving a life term at the Iowa State Penitentiary.

As a rule, investigators don't approach multiple-victim murders differently than single-victim murders, said Wade Kisner, special agent with the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation in Cedar Rapids.

"But resource needs are different," he said. He said more investigators may be needed. In some cases there may be several crime scenes in different locations.

Cedar Rapids police Lt. Kenneth Washburn said about Sunday's murders that not a lot more resources are being used than in a single-victim murder.

"It's taking us a little bit more time because (there are) several places to process - the victim's apartment, suspect's place, the car," Washburn said.

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Illustration: GRAPHIC

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Murders: Victims statewide

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