

How a murderer used Grindr to find victims

Last October, dad-of-two Paul Taylor left his home and never returned. He was murdered by a man he chatted to on Grindr. His 19-year-old killer, Jack Crawley, attempted to murder another man he also met on the app. As police encourage potential victims to come forward in an often-anonymous world, what is being done to keep people safe?

Unbeknown to his family, he was living a double life, something they only discovered through the most harrowing of circumstances. "I will never have the opportunity to hear from Paul about his lifestyle choices," his widow Maria wrote in a victim impact statement, adding, "but I do not judge him".

Paul was murdered by Jack Crawley. The pair had previously met for sex through the app Grindr. Last October, they went to a secluded area in Carlisle, where Crawley then bludgeoned Paul to death with a hammer and stole his car. His body was not discovered until seven months later. Crawley also attempted to murder another man near York in January, in what was called an almost "carbon copy" of Paul's murder. His victim, also in his 50s, managed to fight him off.

Grindr is used by three million people every month, and a recent Ofcom report found it was used by roughly 924,000 people in the UK. It says it has safety tips, encourages people to use its video calling feature to verify an identity before meeting, and to report suspicious behaviour.

Stevie Westgarth, director of non-profit Queer Cumbria, said he believes the county's "conservative nature" means many men feel pressured to hide their sexuality through anonymous profiles. "People feel like it's normal to hide behind them," he explained. "And it means we can't make that distinction between dangerous people hiding, and people who are hiding because they feel like they can't be their honest selves in society."

Analysis of police data by the BBC showed more than 6,000 people reported offences linked to dating apps used by people of all sexual orientations between 2017 and 2021. Dr Ben Colliver, a criminologist at Birmingham City University, conducted research into the risks surrounding Grindr, prompted by a series of violent robberies by a gang who used the app to target LGBTQ+ people. "What we see in the news tends to be the most extreme levels of violence," he said. He said he believes crimes involving the app, particularly "low level violence", are underreported.

"If you haven't told anyone about your sexuality and you use Grindr to meet someone and you experience violence, how do you explain that to the police without disclosing that you were using Grindr?"