

Lessons Learned Briefing

Domestic Homicide Review

Victim A 'Deborah' - Deceased April 2018

This brief aims to help professionals improve future responses to domestic abuse, based on the learnings from a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) undertaken by the Wakefield Community Safety Partnership. We aim to represent the victim's voice and be respectful and compassionate towards them and their families.

What happened?

Victim A was a 62-year-old White British woman who lived with her husband and her 42-year-old son. Victim A's son lived with his mother and step-father on release from Prison.

Not long after moving in, Victim A and her husband raised concerns about her son's drug use and disturbing behaviour. Her son was also showing abusive and threatening behaviour towards her, and the police were called on several occasions.

The Victim's son had a history of substance misuse and perpetrating domestic abuse within intimate partner relationships. He was known within the criminal justice system for other offending behaviour and presented on occasions with agitated and paranoid behaviour. Victim A had long term health problems and increasingly relied on her husband for care.

Victim A was seriously injured by her son and subsequently died five days later as a direct result of the injuries. Her son is now detained indefinitely under a Hospital Order under the Mental Health Act 1983.

What did the review tell us?

The review did not find any opportunities where one individual or service could have predicted the circumstances of the death.

But some key issues were identified:

- Domestic abuse does not solely occur in intimate relationships.
- Victim A never expressed fear for her safety because of her son - but she was never asked.
- It would have been good practice to have had a clear record of whether she and her husband were asked directly if they had a reason to be concerned about their own safety.
- The perpetrator had a long history of substance misuse, which was a contributory factor in the deterioration of his physical and mental health. Domestic Abuse must not be forgotten in situations where other complex issues are present.
- There were complex health needs and associated medication in the household. Although the perpetrator at one point claimed he was drug free, it's possible that he was self-medicating with prescribed drugs in his reach at home.
- There was an over-reliance on self-referrals and signposting to services.
- Health Care professionals who variously saw the perpetrator were unaware of the pattern of paranoid behaviour. Assessments relied on the information he shared.
- Victim A did not meet the criteria for Adult Social Care, despite having health problems.
- On one occasion, a DASH found there was standard risk.

How can we improve?

Training

Professionals to be aware of the complexities of domestic abuse where there are drug misuse and mental health issues within the household.

Professionals need to understand the dynamics and barriers disclosing domestic abuse when the perpetrator is the child of the victim.

Professional Curiosity

Assessments should not focus exclusively on discussions with individuals, but professionals should seek wider information. The relationship between the use of drugs and mental health issues need to be understood and considered when assessing risk and providing an appropriate response.

The Role of Health Professionals

Keep under active review the prescriptions of opiate-based medication including households where there may be multiple prescriptions. Encourage consent to refer to services rather than signpost and share concerns with other health professionals. Utilise out of house mental health crisis support.

Assessment

Information through self-disclosure and direct observation can be significantly enhanced by professionals encouraging the giving of consent to speak with other relevant people or seeking information from other services. It is important to seek as far as possible and practicable to gather relevant history and context information to inform assessment of risk and response.

Ask the Question

Professionals need to ask the question about domestic abuse and clarify if someone feels scared and unsafe.

Recording and Sharing Information

Record all contact professional or otherwise and maintain comprehensive records. It is especially important to record if they have asked about domestic abuse, your response and any actions.

Professionals who have concerns about an individual need to be more proactive around communicating or sharing this information.

Family Relationships

Professionals to be aware and understand the complexities of a domestic abuse situation where an adult child is the abuser. This needs to be considered, particularly in relation to housing issues.

Criminal Justice System

Professionals to consider the risk to family members when offenders are released from custody / prison and ensure appropriate services are involved to provide support.



The full DHR Report has been approved by the Home Office in 2020. For further information visit wakefield.gov.uk/DHR or email DHR@wakefield.gov.uk