

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW (DHR)

Concise Summary of Learning

9th January 2024

Introduction

A Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in Greater Manchester commissioned a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) following the murder of a female victim. After completing the DHR, the CSP decided not to publish either the DHR Overview Report or the Executive Summary because of the likely negative impact of publication on the emotional wellbeing of her children.

However, the CSP took the view that the DHR had drawn out important learning from this tragic case and that the learning could safely be published in this concise summary report without any risk of harm to the victim's children.

The Review

The victim was murdered by her former partner. Their fairly brief relationship had ended several years before the homicide took place. However, regular contact between victim and perpetrator continued after their relationship ended primarily because a child born to the victim and perpetrator was placed with the perpetrator and his then partner under a Child Arrangement Order (CAO) (1). Under the terms of the CAO, the victim's subsequent contact with the child was supervised by the perpetrator and his then partner.

In the years that followed, the victim disclosed some tensions around her contact with the child to health professionals, but no other concerns about the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator came to the notice of agencies prior to the murder. The family and friends of the victim disclosed to the DHR that the perpetrator exploited the placement of the child with him to manipulate, control and possibly coerce the victim to have sex with him. The family of the victim felt that she was unwilling to report this abusive behaviour to the authorities because she thought she would not be believed, given the fact that the child had been removed from her care at birth.

The victim was a vulnerable woman who had suffered domestic abuse in many of her intimate and a familial relationship. She had self-harmed and attempted to take her own life.

The victim's former partner was a perpetrator of domestic abuse in several intimate and familial relationships but at the time the CAO was granted, he had not come to the notice of the police for domestic abuse for several years.

CAOs are private law orders but Children's Services may be involved. In this case Children's Services had carried out a pre-birth assessment which informed the decision to remove the child from the victim and place the child with victim's former partner and his then partner. However, the assessments which underpinned the granting of the CAO were overly optimistic and the power that placing the child with victim's

former partner conferred upon him, which he appears to have subsequently exploited, was not considered at the time the Order was granted. The victim's ex-partner and his partner dishonestly presented as a couple in a stable long-term relationship when this was not the case and when there were clear indications that the Order was breaking down, the response of both Children's Services and the Health Visiting service was insufficient. Additionally, the ongoing risk that the victim may obtain greater contact with the child over time than originally envisaged did not appear to be fully considered either.

Other agencies which might have contributed to the monitoring of the Order, particularly the GP practice at which the child was registered, did not appear to be made aware of the existence of the Order and their recording of which adults the child was living with was insufficient.

Therefore, a key learning theme from this DHR is the need for enhanced professional awareness of the potential for CAO's to be exploited or subverted to coerce or control individuals who are a party to the CAO.

One of the specific recommendations arising from the DHR is for the relevant Children's Services to review the arrangements for the grant of Child Arrangement Orders in which children's social care are involved, or in cases when they are invited by Cafcass to be involved. The review should consider the response to indications that the Order may be breaking down and the notification of the Orders to partners, particularly primary care.

Another key learning theme is that the victim's limited access to her child appeared to adversely affect her mental health and emotional wellbeing. A further recommendation for Children's Services is to ensure appropriate emotional support is offered to parents whose children are removed from their care. Loss of custody or restrictions on contact with their children appears to be an important theme emerging from the increasing number of cases in which women who have been suffering domestic abuse take their own lives.

Additional learning from this DHR includes:

- the need for professionals to consider both the victim and the perpetrator's prior domestic abuse history, including domestic abuse in earlier relationships, when assessing risk and making referrals.

- the need for professionals to make people who may be at risk of domestic abuse from partners aware of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and the need to continue to promote public awareness of the Scheme.
- the need to review current methods of raising public awareness of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme
- when practitioners are working with families where there are concurrent safeguarding children and domestic abuse and violence concerns, that practitioners do not overlook the needs of parents who are suffering domestic violence and abuse.
- that the relevant NHS Foundation Trust considers discussion with the relevant GP or other referrer when service users are repeatedly unable to engage with mental health services in addition to adopting more assertive attempts to reach out, including where there are safeguarding concerns to consider contact with partner agencies who are in contact with the service user to promote engagement.

(1) **Child Arrangement Orders** were introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014. They replaced Contact Orders and Residence Orders. A Child Arrangement Order means a court order regulating arrangements relating to any of the following:

- a. with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact; and
- b. when a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with any person.

A person named in the order as a person with whom the child is to live, will have Parental Responsibility for the child while the order remains in force. Where a person is named in the order as a person with whom the child is to spend time or otherwise have contact, but is not named in the order as a person with whom the child is to live, the court may provide in the order for that person to have Parental Responsibility for the child while the order remains in force.

Child Arrangements Orders are private law orders, and cannot be made in favour of a local authority.