

LEARNING FROM DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW



SAFER SHEFFIELD PARTNERSHIP

SARAH - ADULT W 2022

WHAT HAPPENED?

Sarah was a 47-year-old Somali Muslim woman. Sarah had three children; her eldest daughter Kay had moved to foster care aged 14 due to the abusive and controlling behaviour of her stepfather Aasif. Children Social Care were involved with all three children for various periods of time.

Aasif was a 43-year-old Afghan Muslim man. Both Sarah and Aasif had come to the UK as refugees, fleeing war in their respective countries. Both Sarah and Aasif lived with long term mental health conditions.

Just before her death, Sarah had been struggling with her mental health and she had been voluntarily admitted to a mental health unit – Aasif had constantly called Sarah and had sat outside the unit in his car, along with their two children, encouraging Sarah to return home.

The evening after she was admitted, Sarah left the unit without telling any of the staff where she was going. Staff called her at 9pm and she stated she had returned home. At 3.30am the following morning, Aasif called police and stated that he had killed his wife.

Police attended the home, where Sarah was found with multiple stab wounds, she was pronounced dead at the scene. The children had been in bed during the incident and were taken into foster care. Aasif was arrested and charged with her murder. Three weeks later, Aasif was found deceased in his cell – in June 2023 an inquest found that he had died by suicide.

WHAT DID IT TELL US?

Sarah was a black African refugee woman, living with coercive control and violence in the home. Sarah was a mother, living with mental health issues linked to both the trauma of fleeing war and of living with an abusive husband. Sarah's husband was also living with trauma. There was a lack of trauma informed practice. By developing a robust understanding of intersectionality, professionals can begin to identify the barriers to accessing support which are created where a domestic abuse victim's characteristics, experiences and social circumstances intersect.

The review maps the specifics of Aasif's behaviours and Sarah's experiences, against the Homicide Timeline developed by Professor Jane Monckton Smith.

Professionals involved within victim/survivors of abuse, need to be able to recognise a "stage three situation" which can last a lifetime. This stage involves routine and ritual, jealousy and isolation, and to the outside world Sarah may have been viewed as "choosing" to be in the relationship.

There was a lack of recognition by all agencies of high-risk indicators e.g. non-fatal strangulation and threats to kill.

Very few DASHs were completed throughout the scoping period. Professionals assumed a DASH was being completed by another agency.

WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

A [Homicide Timeline event](#), using the learning from Sarah's case, will be held to encourage professional curiosity, the identification of high-risk indicators, and subsequently the completion of DASH risk assessments, and MARAC referrals

A programme of [trauma informed practice training](#) will be made accessible for professionals in all services. Each agency involved with the review will be required to provide a plan, and timescales, for all relevant staff to attend this. A model/template for trauma informed practice – including trauma informed supervision – will be made available for all agencies to adapt to their own requirements.

All agencies will be reminded about the availability of [DASH risk assessment training](#). A commitment will be made by those agencies with professionals who have regular contact with the public, to have access to DASH training and ensure DASH assessments are completed by staff where appropriate.

Compassionate leadership has been made a priority for Sheffield City Council's City Goals, and this review endorses the requirement for agencies and professionals to embrace this work; particularly those agencies which regularly work with adults and children affected by trauma.

All partner agencies involved with Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences will be trained on the Signs of Safety model, to understand their responsibilities when undertaking the scaling exercise, and to understand what the scaling represents.

