DOMESTIC ABUSE-RELATED DEATH REVIEW

LEARNING BRIEF - TRACEY

Domestic Homicide Review (DHR)

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004) defines a Domestic Homicide Review as a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse, or neglect. This multi-agency process seeks to identify lessons to be learnt from the death and prevent harm from happening in similar circumstances in the future. More information on the DHR process can be found on the KBSP website.

Background Information - Tracey

Tracey (pseudonym) was a resident of Bristol and was in her 20s when she died. Tracey had been in a relationship with Simon (pseudonym) who was 18 years older than her. Simon had an extensive number of convictions against him including previous domestic abuse involving multiple female victims. Tracey and Simon lived together and their relationship involved excessive alcohol consumption and illicit drug taking, which in turn led to reports of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour.

Tracey's mother kindly provided a description of her: "She was the best daughter I could have wished for. She was kind, thoughtful, and great company. She was very loyal and protective of her little sister and brother. She grew up without any problems or issues."

Key Themes

Dependency and Power Imbalances

The dynamics of dependency and power imbalances were central to Tracey's experience. Women's Aid reports that the risk of serious harm or homicide increases significantly when a victim attempts to leave an abusive relationship. This is particularly acute when the victim is dependent on the perpetrator for accommodation as well as emotionally and socially. This dependency was reinforced by shared substance misuse, increasing her entrapment and reducing her autonomy. Tracey's circumstances reflect how coercive control can entrench dependency, making it harder for victims to leave abusive environments or to engage fully with support services.

Working with Alcohol and Substance Use

Tracey's history of substance use must be understood within the broader context of trauma and structural disadvantage. Tracey experienced instability and familial substance misuse during her childhood, as well as periods of homelessness which likely influenced her own use of alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism. Rather than being treated as a lifestyle choice, her behaviour should have been understood as a response to past trauma and current abuse. In practice, however, professionals working with Tracey did not always respond with a trauma-informed lens, missing the chance to explore the underlying causes of her substance use and how it intersected with domestic abuse and exploitation.

Nevertheless, persistent efforts were made by The Nelson Trust, Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, drugs and alcohol support, and court-based support to engage Tracey resulting in her receiving support at court where she was able to discuss her plans to detox and access support from her GP. This highlights the importance of multi-agency coordination and a non-judgemental, trauma-informed lens when supporting individuals facing multiple disadvantages.

Housing is essential to Safeguarding

Safe and appropriate housing is a critical safeguarding concern for individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Tracey did not have her own tenancy and occupied Simon's home. Tracey explicitly sought support from The Nelson Trust to leave Simon and secure alternative accommodation, she also presented as homeless and was being assessed. Despite this, she continued to reside in the same block of flats as Simon, a decision that placed her at continued risk. A relative made an offer of accommodation to Tracey and this was accepted by Bristol Housing as an interim provision whilst her homeless application was being assessed. However, despite this offer being genuine, Tracey did not accept it. Bristol Housing will confirm any accommodation offers from friends/relatives with the applicant to ensure they are willing to accept it. The applicant's views must be considered and included in the assessment.

This case demonstrates that housing decisions must incorporate rigorous risk assessments to cross-check victim and perpetrator details, accommodation suitability and should always be informed by an understanding of abuse, trauma, and gender-based violence in order to put in place proactive intervention to prevent unsafe dependencies. Housing must be treated not as a peripheral issue, but as central to safeguarding and risk management.

Risk and Vulnerability in the Context of Domestic Abuse

Tracey's case highlights the importance of understanding domestic abuse and coercive control beyond a series of isolated incidents. Multiple warning signs such as visible injuries, her dependency on Simon, his past offending history and their shared drug and alcohol use were not sufficiently connected through a holistic risk assessment. The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool should have prompted further consideration of her vulnerability and safety, however, the fragmented nature of responses meant critical signs of escalating risk were overlooked. Crucially, no Domestic Violence Protection Notices or Orders were considered, despite there being indicators that would have justified their use. A more robust response would have required professional curiosity, with practitioners consistently questioning Tracey's safety in her relationship and responding to concerns with urgency and persistence.

Good Practice

- Good practice was also identified in Tracey's case. **The police attended all domestic related incidents involving Simon and Tracey in a timely manner and recorded them as such appropriately.** Officer perceived risk assessments were also completed for both parties.
- **The Nelson Trust provided tenacious and compassionate support,** helping Tracey plan for alternative accommodation and offering consistent engagement. These examples show that with the right training, procedures, and persistence, meaningful support can be provided.

Recommendations

- **Bristol Housing** to ensure that if a friend / relative offers temporary accommodation for an applicant, that this is checked with the applicant to ensure that they are of the view that it is suitable, and they are prepared to accept the offer. The views of the applicant must be taken into account and included in the assessment.
- **Bristol Housing** to ensure that when an address is identified at assessment for a homeless applicant to stay at temporarily, this address is cross checked with the Estates system to establish firstly whether it is a BCC tenancy, and if so that it is reasonable for the applicant to stay there, even if just for a short time.
- **Bristol GP Practices** to ensure recognition in ability to respond to signs of domestic abuse, demonstrating improved professional curiosity and asking about domestic abuse during consultation when presenting with a NICE indicators of Domestic Abuse.

- **Bristol GP Practices** Learning from this DHR to be shared with the local practices.
- **AWP, ASCC** to utilise learning from this case to highlight the need for improved professional curiosity in regard to assessing the vulnerability and safety of domestic violence victims and that onward referrals are progressed and monitored.
- **Avon and Somerset Police** to utilise learning from this case to highlight the need for improved professional curiosity in regard to assessing the vulnerability and safety of domestic violence victims.

Support

Multiple disadvantage

The Nelson Trust support women through community services such as advocacy, group work, educational courses and more. They also provide support through a residential rehabilitation treatment programme to support people to recover from drug and alcohol use. Contact **office@nelsontrust.com** or **01453 885633.**

Changing Futures are a Bristol resource that brings together organisations to improve the experiences of people with multiple disadvantages. This is completed through coproduction with lived experience to create trauma-informed resources and enable change across all system levels. Find them at **www.changingfuturesbristol.co.uk**

Drug and Alcohol Support

Bristol Horizons is the new drug and alcohol partnership supporting adults and young people with their substance use concerns or for those affected by others substance use. Professionals can refer or anyone can self refer at **www.horizonsbristol.co.uk**

Where to find us:

KBSP@bristol.gov.uk
@KBSPartnership
www.bristolsafeguarding.org

Domestic Abuse

Next Link Plus offer specialist domestic abuse support for women, men and children from all communities (including LGBTQ+ and black and minority ethnic). They will support with any additional needs (for example substance misuse, mental health, hearing difficulties, learning disabilities, etc.). Call 0117 925 0680, text 07407 895620, email enquiries@nextlinkhousing.co.uk or online chat via the Next Link website.