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Domestic Homicide Review: Adult A (who died in December 2019)

Executive summary – November 2022

Independent Chair: Kevin Ball

Introduction & synopsis of the case under review:

This Domestic Homicide Review examined the involvement of local professionals and organisations with Adult A, who died in December 2019. The term 'Adult A' has been chosen by family members. Adult A, aged 32 years old, died as a direct result of having been assaulted by her husband, Adult B. Another adult, Adult C, who was passing by at the time of the incident and who tried to intervene also died as a result of being attacked and injuries suffered. Adult A and Adult B had been in a relationship for 10 years and had been married for 12 months; both were of white British origin and ethnicity, and described as a loving and very happy couple. Following the assault and Police investigation the matter went to criminal Court. Adult B accepted responsibility for the death of Adult A and also the individual, Adult C, that tried to intervene. The trial concluded with Adult B found guilty of double murder and sentenced to 26½ years in prison.

The review process:

The Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act 2004 sets out the circumstances when a Domestic Homicide Review should be considered referring to the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 years or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a) a person to whom he/she was related or with whom he/she had been in an intimate personal relationship, or b) a member of the same household as himself/herself.

The Safer West Sussex Partnership commissioned the review in June 2020. An Independent Chair was appointed and a Review Panel formed with representation from the Police, Safer West Sussex Partnership, Clinical Commissioning Group, and District Council Community Safety. The Panel met throughout the review process as needed, in order to ensure the smooth and timely progress of the review. Following the conclusion of the Court trial the review was able to conclude in May 2021 once family members had been approached. Members of both the victim and offender's family were kept fully informed and involved. Adult B actively opted out of contributing to the review. The parents of both Adult A and Adult B have reviewed the full DHR report and agreed with the findings and recommendation. The full report and this executive summary have been quality assured by the Home Office Quality Assurance Panel in March and October 2022, and publication granted by the Home Office on the 1 February 2023.

An extensive and systematic exercise was conducted to gather information that might be held about Adult A and Adult B by local services. Information returned highlighted a total lack of contact with services, other than routine contact with GP services; nothing of significance was provided from information held by the GP nor from Adult A's employer. Some work related stress was noted by a work colleague of Adult B. The lack of any identified contact by Adult A or Adult B with any agency led to the decision not to request Individual Management Reviews.

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Review findings & learning:

There was no evidence that there were any relationship difficulties or domestic abuse between Adult A and Adult B. Adult B had been experiencing some stress through work related issues. In this case the finding of traces of a psychoactive substance in Adult B's system was a complicating factor reminding us of the risks and unpredictable effects of misusing drugs; although Adult B denied ever taking any such drugs. Prior to this, Adult B had no history of emotional or mental health problems to the extent that they were seen to impair his thinking or behaviour. Adult B did not seek any professional support for the work-related stress he reported to be experiencing. The view of expert opinion in the criminal trial concluded that Adult B had experienced some form of abnormal and acute mental state, in the form of a hypomanic episode, which as a consequence resulted in him killing two people.

The review has identified three general public health messages to promote via all agencies, all professionals as well as the general public. These are:

- a) *Emotional and mental health and everyday living*: encouraging anyone who may be feeling or experiencing some level of emotional or mental stress, to talk about their worries, consider diet and exercise, and seek specialist support.
- b) *Drug use and mental health*: raising awareness about the unpredictable impact on mood or behaviour of misusing drugs or alcohol and discouraging anyone who may be experiencing any form of emotional or mental health stress from misusing such substances.
- c) All employers, work colleagues, friends and family need to remain open and curious about the possibility of domestic abuse and controlling relationships.

Recommendation:

The following recommendations are made for the Home Office and Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office as well as the Safer West Sussex Partnership:

1. The Home Office & the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office should ensure that all employers are made aware of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 guidance and employers responsibilities laid out within this. Employers should be directed to the Employers' Initiative for Domestic Abuse (EIDA), a business network which empowers employers to take action against domestic abuse, for their staff, and their sector.
2. The Home Office & the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office should ensure that all employers should be referred to the Public Health England & Business In The Community Domestic Abuse Employer Toolkit. This toolkit helps employers of all sizes and sectors make a commitment to respond to the risk of domestic abuse and build an approach that ensures all employees feel supported and empowered by their workplace to deal with domestic abuse.
3. The Safer West Sussex Partnership should ensure that West Sussex local businesses are in receipt of information regarding their responsibilities as employers as laid out within the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance 2021 and referred to the Public Health England & Business In The Community Domestic Abuse Employer Toolkit.
4. The Safer West Sussex Partnership will ensure all that its Board Member organisations review whether they have domestic abuse policies in place and ensure employees are made aware of these policies and are aware of domestic abuse resources and pathways of support.
5. The Safer West Sussex Partnership should work with relevant agencies and other strategic partnerships to examine methods for reaching into local communities and that encourage adults (particularly adult males) to seek support about emotional or mental health worries.