

David - Serious Incident Review

Sheffield Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership



What happened?

In June 2018 David, a 33 year old male was stabbed non-fatally with a knife to the chest by his partner Stephanie after he had allegedly physically assaulted her – the knife narrowly missed vital organs. Stephanie was arrested but charges were later dropped as David did not support a prosecution. Two weeks prior to the incident David had attempted to strangle Stephanie in an incident assessed as high risk. The case was scheduled at MARAC four days after this incident.

David is a serial perpetrator of domestic abuse towards five separate women over an 11 year period. He has a police record, has been convicted of domestic abuse perpetration and he was on license managed by the National Probation Service with conditions to inform them of any new relationships he formed and to attend the Building Better Relationships perpetrator programme. He failed to attend all but one session of the programme.

Stephanie, the perpetrator in this incident, is a serial victim of domestic abuse, perpetrated by three separate males. Domestic abuse support has been offered previously with limited engagement.

Stephanie is a single mother of one child who has been known to Children's Social Care since early infancy. Stephanie was a victim of childhood sexual abuse, and has diagnosed mental health and substance misuse issues which escalate when life becomes particularly challenging. She has a history of being violent including towards an ex-partner who was abusive towards her.

After the incident, Stephanie shared that the relationship with David started around November 2017; however the status of their relationship was not fully established by Children's Social Care until January 2018. David did not share details of his new relationship with NPS.

Between January and March 2018, Stephanie's son was moved from being a Child in Need onto a Child Protection Plan. Social Care involvement was extensive with regular contacts between Stephanie and the social worker and with a worker at Shelter, who supported Stephanie as she was at risk of homelessness.

Stephanie experienced an escalation in domestic abuse from April 2018 – reporting multiple incidents to

the police; harassment from her ex and two standard risk assessed incidents by David. David had been physically abusive on previous occasions. Domestic abuse support was offered and refused.

Stephanie often minimised the abuse she was experiencing and used 'disguised compliance' – saying what the worker wants to hear, that her son was being better behaved and that David did not have contact with him. However it later became clear that this was not the case.

Services other than the Police failed to complete a DASH risk assessment, despite discussing domestic abuse with Stephanie both in relation to David but also in relation to harassment and threats from her son's father. A backlog in police incidents being reported to Social Care meant key information was delayed and Stephanie later denied these reports to her social worker. Social Care did not complete background checks on David in a timely manner; which meant all potential risk factors were not considered at a Safeguarding Hub strategy meeting. A Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) / Clare's Law application was explored but assumptions were made that another worker had completed it.

Dates of birth were inaccurate on the MARAC agenda resulting in limited information being shared at the first MARAC. There were also limited actions agreed or explored to address serial perpetration.

What did it tell us?

All the evidence suggests that Stephanie is an individual who will use retaliatory violence towards people when she feels threatened. In the months leading up to the incident she experienced an escalation in domestic abuse, parenting issues, a challenging housing situation and deteriorating mental health.

Timely responses are required by services to minimise the risk of domestic abuse. A series of delays and assumptions by workers meant agencies missed opportunities to understand the impact of coercive control on Stephanie's behaviour and engagement with agencies, to use professional curiosity, and to share details of support services and encourage Stephanie's engagement with them.

What can we do now?

Be mindful that the use of coercive control may impact on a person's behaviour and minimisation of abuse and their compliance with support and safety plans.

Undertake timely background checks on people who may pose a risk of being abusive in preparation for safeguarding meetings.

MARAC should consider actions around serial perpetration of abuse and use a flagging system for 'live/ hot' cases where abuse is continuing following initial referral.

Workers should use the DVDS/ Clare's law process when they are aware of information relating to risk of domestic abuse.

Consider opportunities to raise awareness of domestic abuse in local communities, encouraging reporting if they suspect neighbours may be experiencing abuse.

Complete the DASH on all occasions where domestic abuse is disclosed and promote support services.

