

Learning Brief

Domestic Abuse Related Death

DHR2024-3

Background

In 2024, Derbyshire Police reported a death potentially linked to domestic abuse following a violent altercation between two men from the same family. The victim subsequently died due to complications from a pre-existing brain condition; a condition that was not known by the victim prior to the incident. A multi-agency panel decided not to conduct a full Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR) but identified some learning opportunities. The Home Office agreed with the local decision not to conduct a formal review and was supportive of a learning brief being developed to improve future practice.

Key Findings

Family Context:

The victim and suspect were connected through family with the suspect being in a relationship with the victim's sister. Both males had histories of mental health issues, drug use and adverse childhood experiences, with the extended family known to multiple agencies for domestic abuse, neglect and substance use.

Incident Dynamics:

On the night of the incident, a fight between the suspect and victim escalated, reportedly due to drug use; both parties were noted by emergency services as intoxicated. The suspect previously identified as a domestic abuse perpetrator against his partner and her mother. No evidence of abuse between the victim and suspect were identified, however wider familial violence was present.

Learning Themes

Adult Family Violence:

Domestic abuse can occur between family members, not just intimate partners. Risk factors including mental health, substance use and domestic abuse often co-exist and compound trauma.

Professional Curiosity & Persistence:

Avoid confirmation bias; investigate beyond surface explanations. Persist in engagement, especially with families known long-term to services where their confidence in agencies to support them may be low. Recognise fluctuating risk levels, encourage disclosure and reflect on past incidents.

Protective Factors:

Identify individuals within families or communities who can act as protective influences. Ensure they are aware of available support and empowered to refer.

Actions

Raise Awareness:

Domestic abuse can be familial; educate communities and professionals. Highlight links between childhood trauma, mental health, substance use and abuse. Promote non-judgmental, accessible support services.

Progress since 2024

Local multi-agency domestic abuse training now includes information relating to domestic abuse between family members and the cumulative impact of trauma, poor mental health and substance use. Professionals, including police staff and domestic abuse agencies, are trained to adopt a trauma-informed approach and consider the experiences and impact of an individual within their family context, including inter-generational abuse. A free to access trauma-informed training package has been developed locally and shared widely in 2025-2026.

Support Professional Practice:

Encourage curiosity and persistence in risk assessments. Provide clear pathways and resources for complex cases, including taking a trauma-informed approach to people who have experienced multiple disadvantages through their lives.

Progress since 2024

There is improved understanding of the importance of professional curiosity in supporting complex cases and the role previous trauma may play in their presentation to agencies. This has included updated training and a strengthened DHR/DARDR action review process which themes recommendations across reviews, of which one is professional curiosity.

Core Message

Persistent, informed engagement and awareness of the challenge individuals within a family context experience are critical to preventing escalation, particularly with families who have experienced multiple disadvantages or have a range of vulnerabilities.