

## Key recommendations

The SSCB is to make a recommendation to the relevant national body to request that army medical records of former military personnel can be accessed where there are concerns about a person's presenting health which could potentially affect the safeguarding of their children.

The learning and outcomes of this Serious Case Review should be disseminated to professionals. This should include information about the study of filicide and the associated research.

Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a time of transition and reorganisation within the health services the SSCB must be assured that the relevant health organisations are being held to account for the implementation of their action plans arising from their Individual Management Reviews.



## LEARNING FROM A SERIOUS CASE REVIEW

Child U and Child V

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The SSCB conducted a Serious Case Review as a result of events in 2012 where children U and V were killed by their father during an agreed contact visit; their father subsequently killed himself. Prior to the incident they appeared to have had an enjoyable day with their extended paternal family.

The review highlights the risks to children following parental separation and highlights the need to ensure that awareness of filicide is cascaded to all professionals. It should be noted that the coroner found that the deaths were unpredictable and unpreventable.

## **Synopsis**

On the way home from a contact visit, the children were killed by their father, who subsequently killed himself.

The parents had only had intermittent contact with health professionals. In early spring 2012, the mother reported to her GP that her husband's verbal abuse and controlling behaviours had got worse and were negatively affecting the children.

In late summer 2012, the parents attended a party in another part of the country. The mother subsequently presented in A&E in that area, supported by the father, saying that she had slipped. She sustained injuries to her shoulder, face and also broke her tooth. No concerns about domestic abuse emerged at this point.

Upon the family's return to Surrey, the mother saw her GP and said she had sustained the injuries as a result of being pushed by her husband. She was advised to report this to the police. Mother stated that this was the first time that father had been violent towards her.

Mother and children left the family home and went to stay with friends. Father subsequently attended the police station was arrested, interviewed and bailed. He denied any abusive behaviour and said that his wife had fallen, having had too much to drink. He then went to see the GP in a distressed state.

Allegations were later made by the mother that the father was in breach of bail conditions and she was advised to seek an injunction. Contact arrangements were agreed in court, and it was agreed contact would be arranged through a third party. The mother reported that she had no concerns that the father would harm the children but did have concerns that he may abduct them.

The father made further contact with the GP saying he had been involved in a military incident and that he may have post traumatic stress disorder.

## **The main lessons that have emerged**

It is good practice for a professional to confirm with a parent that they have taken the action they have agreed, to address domestic abuse, and if this hasn't happened for the professional to make appropriate referrals. This would ensure that the safeguarding needs of the child(ren) would not be compromised. Research shows that a number of incidents of domestic abuse usually take place before the victim feels able to take any action.

It is important for professionals to confirm with their colleagues that identified actions and interventions have been undertaken in respect of safeguarding issues. There is a professional responsibility to clarify what is happening if the confirmation is not forthcoming.

Where there are cross border issues, greater care is required by professionals to ensure that information sharing is timely, and to ensure that this is not compromised by differences in the understanding and application of procedures.

All professionals working with families who may experience domestic abuse need to ensure that they can access advice and resources where required. An inability to do so means that safeguarding issues may be overlooked.

When there are safeguarding concerns it is not possible to accurately assess and understand children's needs, wishes and feelings unless they are seen, spoken to and observed by professionals.

Professionals must ensure that they understand the conditions and exact requirements of any legal orders that are presented, by parents, which require professionals to act in a certain manner to protect the children.

Within abusive relationships, research shows that the point at which parents separate presents the greatest risk to partners and potentially for the children.

Violent acts which lead to the death of children can occur without any prior indication, warning, or predisposing factors, and on these occasions, there is nothing which can be done to prevent this.