



# System learning findings from Safeguarding Adult Review 'Katherine'

## What is a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR)?

The purpose of a SAR is to promote effective learning and improvement actions to prevent deaths or serious harm occurring in the future. The methodology for this SAR used a system findings approach. Systems findings focus on the underlying issues that helped or hindered in a case and are systemic rather than one off issues. Each finding attempts to describe a system barrier or enabler and the problem it creates. This approach requires us to think about the wider organisational and cultural factors to understand the persons experience.

**Katherine** was a white British woman in her 80's who was admitted to hospital following a reported assault by her husband. She later died in hospital. Katherine had been married for over 60 years. Both she and her husband held strong religious beliefs. These beliefs informed Katherines decision making throughout her life. Katherine was kind and caring. She had two adult children and loved her animals. She enjoyed spending time in her garden and feeding the birds. Katherine had been married to her husband for over 60 years.



## What were the safeguarding concerns?

Throughout her contact with services Katherine described a married life in which she had experienced domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour over many years. As her husband's health deteriorated with age, this further increased the demands he placed upon her. Katherine was not only his wife but became his carer also. This ultimately placed more strain upon her physical, emotional and mental wellbeing as his demands upon her increased. Katherines first contact with services was because of her role as a carer but some years before her death Katherines physical health deteriorated. She experienced a heart attack resulting in further health complications and a significant decline in her mobility. As a result, she became reliant on her husband for her care needs, to access areas of the home, garden, and community. This created further pressure, control and abuse as her husband still wanted his needs to be met by her.

**Abuse types:** Domestic Abuse, Discriminatory Abuse



## Key findings

- 1 Enable practitioners in all agencies to have a role in 'sowing the seeds' with an older age victim of domestic abuse, of being able to do something about the abuse. The disincentives for older victims to do something about the abuse are many particularly around the traditional role of women, financial dependency or preconceptions about their partners ability to manage without them. It is important to maintain consistent dialogue about an older person's experiences and provide encouragement to accept help.
- 2 If a long-term relationship is marked by domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour opportunities to leave the home and see other people can further reduce as age impacts on mobility and physical health. Dependency of caring roles are layered over earlier relationship dynamics and behaviour patterns. The victim's reliance on their partner makes them more vulnerable and prevent professionals from seeing the presence of abusive behaviours. Normalisation of presentations and the infantilisation of older people may prevent or minimise our understanding of the impact of behaviours.



- 3 Ensure the availability of specialist domestic abuse support to all practitioners working with victims. Develop skill and confidence in completion of **DASH risk assessment** and referral to High-Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) meetings as appropriate. The **Boards Safeguarding Adults procedures** and Multi Agency Risk Management (MARM) guidance also sets out circumstances in which safeguarding adults concerns and multi-agency meetings should be convened to share information and develop risk management plans to support the person to remain safe.
- 4 Improve understanding and clarity about use of different multi agency meetings. Multi agency working, and information sharing is key to a safe system. Many different meetings were used to bring professionals together - MARM, Virtual Wards, HRDA. A clearer understanding of the role and remit of these meetings is needed to ensure the correct oversight of arrangements and support the person safely. Make every meeting count.
- 5 Enable confidence across agencies to engage with individuals about their abusive behaviour particularly in lifelong relationships. Conversations needed to be opened with her husband about his behaviour and explorations of programmes/ interventions locally for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Contact should be made with the Community Safety Partnership to improve awareness of available and appropriate perpetrator programmes locally. **Dorset Community Safety Partnership - Dorset Council**
- 6 Engagement with faith groups as important safeguarding partners. Faith leaders, staff and volunteers of faith organisations and community members can play an important role. Faith leaders and groups can help to challenge behaviours or assumptions that might be considered against their religion. Leaders can help shape discussions about domestic abuse. Faith should be seen as a resource not a roadblock.



### Good practice

- 1 The positive relationship developed by Carers Case worker and Social Worker enabled Katherine to disclose and discuss the abuse she was experiencing.
- 2 GP helped to facilitate a referral to local domestic abuse support services.
- 3 Age UK provided crucial support which enabled Katherine to access the community and challenged her husband's behaviour towards her.



### Dorset Safeguarding Adult Board response and Action plan

- Promote the 'sowing the seeds' message through a communications campaign.
- Hold a support and challenge event with all partners to consider how we identify and respond effectively to older victims of Domestic Abuse.
- Review how Domestic Abuse services are commissioned and map pathways of support.
- Core domestic abuse training to be provided to GPs to maximise their role.
- Seek assurance from commissioners that pathways of support are accessible for older people.
- Work with the Community Safeguarding Partnership to raise awareness of the safeguarding concerns relating to older people experiencing domestic abuse.
- Improve connection with local faith groups and champion importance of domestic abuse work by non-domestic abuse specialists.
- Reinforce importance of information sharing.



For advice or to raise an adult safeguarding concern call:

**Dorset Council area call 01305 221016**

**BCP Council area call 01202 123654**



Read Reflect Discuss – the full report can be accessed here:

**Safeguarding Adults Reviews - Dorset Council**

For more information: **Dorset Safeguarding Adults Board - Dorset Council**