Gloucestershire
Learning Brief – Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR)
Diane - 2024

1. Purpose

This rapid review examines the circumstances surrounding the death of Diane, a 63-year-old woman in Stroud, focusing on learning opportunities for agencies involved in safeguarding adults at risk, particularly where domestic abuse, mental health and substance use intersect.

2. Key Themes & Findings

Trio of Vulnerability

Diane's case highlights the complex interplay between domestic abuse, mental health concerns, and substance misuse. These overlapping vulnerabilities significantly increased her risk of harm and complicated agency responses.

Domestic Abuse

Diane experienced persistent and escalating abuse, primarily coercive control, verbal degradation, and financial exploitation.

Disclosures were often minimized or overshadowed by other issues (e.g. alcohol use).

Agencies sometimes missed opportunities to identify and respond to patterns of abuse, especially when Diane denied allegations or minimized harm.

Alcohol & Mental Health

Diane's alcohol dependency worsened over time, intersecting with trauma and abuse.

Chronic alcohol use exacerbated her depression, anxiety, and physical health decline.

Suicidal ideation was present and linked to both substance misuse and abuse but was not always recognized as a safeguarding issue.

Self-Neglect & Carer Responsibility

Diane's self-neglect was a symptom of her complex vulnerabilities.

Agencies did not consistently identify or address self-neglect as a safeguarding concern.

Larry, her ex-partner, was never formally recognized or supported as a carer, missing opportunities for intervention and holistic assessment.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding

Responses were fragmented; information sharing and coordinated planning were limited.

MARAC referrals occurred, but action plans and continuity were lacking.

Earlier involvement of Adult Social Care and integrated multi-agency meetings could have improved outcomes.

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic amplified existing vulnerabilities, reduced face-to-face contact, and created barriers to disclosure and engagement.

3. Recommendations

Strengthen Multi-Agency Support

Ensure MARAC action plans address all identified risks and partners actively participate in safeguarding.

Housing Involvement

Housing teams should consistently contribute to MARAC and MASH processes.

Domestic Abuse Training

Embed findings from this review, especially the trio of vulnerability, into practitioner training.

Carer Assessments

Recognise and support carers, considering power imbalances and potential for abuse within caring relationships.

4. Lessons for Practice

Professional Curiosity

Look beyond surface disclosures; consider the wider context of trauma, control, and vulnerability.

Holistic, Trauma-Informed Approach

Assess and respond to the full spectrum of needs, not just presenting issues.

Persistent, Flexible Engagement

Recognize that disengagement may reflect unmet need, not lack of interest.

Early, Coordinated Intervention

Proactive, integrated responses can prevent escalation and improve outcomes.