

### Serious case reviews are the model for statutory domestic homicide reviews launched on 13 April 2011

Domestic homicide reviews have become a statutory requirement – and they look very much like existing serious case reviews.

On 31 March 2011, the Home Office published a new Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

This prepared the way for the launch on 13 April 2011 of statutory domestic homicide reviews, when Section 9 of the Domestic Violence and Victims of Crime Act 2004 came into force. Section 9 states that a domestic homicide review should take place when;

'the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by (a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or (b) a member of the same household as himself, ...with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death'.

Implementation of Section 9 creates an expectation that local areas will undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic violence homicide. The provision allows the Secretary of State in particular cases (for example, when a local area fails to initiate a review itself) to direct that a specified person or body establishes or participates in a review. Section 9 also introduces a duty for every person or body establishing or participating in the review to have regard to statutory guidance.

### Overlap with other reviews

This is a welcome move, which is part of the Home Office Violence against Women and Girls strategic plan and is set out in its Call to End Violence against Women and Girls: Action Plan (Action number 75). However, the legal remit is broad and domestic homicide includes those as young as 16. It is likely there will be a significant overlap with children and vulnerable adults serious case reviews and mental health homicide investigations – decisions being made case

by case as to the right form of review or investigation.promote consistency between all types of review and investigation:

## Similarity to serious case reviews

The domestic homicide review Guidance is based on the existing Serious Case Review model for children. There will be Individual Management Reviews (the internal stage) feeding into Overview Reports (the independent stage).

Some of the criticisms made of existing children's serious case reviews may apply to domestic homicide reviews and care will need to be taken in the application of the Guidance. A lack of independence at the commissioning level was a significant concern made by Lord Laming of the Baby Peter Connelly serious case review. Public trust in the objectivity of any review process is essential and, like new serious case reviews, domestic homicide reviews will need to ensure they have systems in place which ensure they are seen to be independent.

## Surprising absence of systems analysis

One notable feature of the domestic homicide review Guidance is the absence of any mention of systems methodology or Root Cause Analysis. This is surprising since these approaches have dominated mental health investigations and are recommended by Professor Eileen Munro in The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A child-centred system, published on 10 May 2011. A principled methodology for practice is yet to develop for the new domestic homicide reviews.

## Recognition of the role of families, friends and colleagues

One very positive feature of domestic homicide reviews marks them out as different from existing children's serious case reviews or those recommended by Professor Eileen Munro. This concerns the potential benefits to be gained by including informal support networks such as friends, families and colleagues who may have detailed knowledge of the victim's experiences; 'The Review Panel should carefully consider the potential benefits gained by including such individuals from both the victim and perpetrator's networks in the review process' (Paragraph 7.1 of the Guidance).

Such benefits include:

- 'Obtaining relevant information held by family members, friends and colleagues which is not recorded in official records.

- Revealing different perspectives of the case, enabling agencies to improve service design and processes.
- Allowing the Review Panel to get a more complete view of the victim's life and see the homicide through the eyes of the victim'. (Paragraph 7.1)

The range of leaflets provided for family members, friends, employers and colleagues is particularly impressive. These are available on the Home Office website at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-homicide-reviews/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-homicide-reviews/). Frank Mullane, whose sister and nephew were victims of fatal domestic abuse, contributed significantly to the writing of these leaflets, ensuring that the legacy of the tragic Pemberton case is involvement where possible of families and friends in future domestic homicide reviews.

## Online training but skills still needed

Supporting its new Guidance, the Home Office offers an online 'training package' for front line practitioners and chairs who take part in domestic homicide reviews.

This is a succinct step-by-step tool to help those undertaking domestic homicide reviews. Emphasis is upon the procedural knowledge necessary to comply with the Guidance.

However, skills and knowledge of techniques for obtaining and analysing information and writing reports will remain a fundamental requirement for those undertaking domestic homicide reviews.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: Frank Mullane, founder of Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse [www.aafda.org.uk](http://www.aafda.org.uk) speaks at Sequeli's Seminar 'Unravelling Reviews' on 8 June 2011. He spoke on domestic homicide reviews on Radio 4 Woman's Hour on 12 April 2011 [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0105z kf/Womans\\_Hour\\_12\\_04\\_2011/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0105z kf/Womans_Hour_12_04_2011/).

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