



Contextual Suicide Thematic Review

Trafford Safeguarding
Adults Board

Trafford Strategic Safeguarding Partnership and Manchester Safeguarding Partnership jointly commissioned a thematic review to examine the cases of five parents who experienced varying combinations of drug and/or alcohol dependency, mental health issues, past trauma and/or domestic abuse, homelessness and debt.

The common factor was that all the parents experienced the legal removal of one or more of their children from their care and all the parents died from apparent suicide. Two of the parents resided in Trafford and three resided in Manchester.

The review considered if the removal of children from the care of the parent was a causal factor in their apparent suicide and the extent to which agencies considered this as an increased risk. The review also considered the actions that could have been taken to safeguard the adult prior to or at the point the child was removed.

The review found that there were multiple factors to indicate the risk of suicide in all the cases considered by this review. Evidence suggests that around 50% of people who die from suicide have previously self-harmed and that the risk of suicide is particularly heightened in the first year after self-harm, especially in the first month.

In two of the cases the parents died from suicide following discharge from an in-patient psychiatric admission under the Mental Health Act following episodes of psychosis. In contrast, the deaths of two of the mothers happened during the process of working with professionals to try and regain custody of their children.

This review focuses on the professional perception of children as 'protective factors'. Children are often seen by adult facing professionals as protective factors when a parent is at risk of suicide. However, whilst the removal of the child reduces the risk to the child, it can increase the risk of suicide for the parent. The review highlights the need for professionals to re-think how they formulate their assessments of risk to self in respect of parents from whom their children have been removed.

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Headline findings from the review:

- The removal of a child was identified as a risk factor to parental suicide.
- However, this needs to be viewed in combination with the other risk factors such as mental health, drug and alcohol use, unstable accommodation, debt and previous trauma. The review found evidence of a cumulative build-up of risk with each additional element.
- Most importantly the review found that, before and at the point a child is removed, it is important that there is equal support for the parent from professionals within the adults multi-agency system to assess risk and offer practical, emotional and advocacy support that works in tandem with children's social care working primarily in the interests of the child.

Next Steps: a Contextual Suicide Task and Finish will work to understand how adults at risk of suicide are currently identified as part of the legal removal of a child and review the current offer of support to a parent before and after a child is removed. The group will also review how current risk management policies, social care practice standards and preventative support models applied by children's and adults' services work together as part of a whole-family multi-disciplinary team approach in Trafford.

Learning for mental health and housing services:

Each parent had a substantial mental health history and learning suggest the need for earlier intervention to try and prevent deterioration in mental health. Homelessness also affected two of the parents and fear of eviction was an issue for one of the others. All three parents had complex needs including the impacts of trauma in early life. The review highlights that the support from housing at this time was transactional, e.g. focussing on negotiating amounts to be paid to clear rent arrears, despite one of the parents being in hospital at the time because of their mental health.

The review recommends improvements in the sharing of information between mental health services and the relevant housing provider as part of the risk management response, and for housing staff to be trained to recognise tenants who may be vulnerable or struggling to cope, to offer appropriate support.

Next Steps: In response to the learning, mental health services are introducing a new data recording system so where an adult known to them repeatedly attempts to take their own life, the incidents trigger management intervention.

Common themes which could help to inform recommendations for change:

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| ▪ The Impact on children of bereavement by suicide | ▪ Self-Neglect |
| ▪ Loss of hope | ▪ Drug and Alcohol Use |
| ▪ Mental Capacity / Mental Health Services | ▪ Children as 'Protective Factors' |
| ▪ Opening up conversations about the removal of children | ▪ Homelessness / Housing Providers |
| ▪ Trauma arising from removal of a child | |