



Trafford and Manchester's Contextual Suicide Thematic Review

Professionals Briefing

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 primary focus of this analysis is on the lawful removal of children from their parents or lawful restriction on parental contact with their children as potential antecedents of suicide. However, there were many other antecedents of suicide present in the cases considered by this review. Evidence suggests that around 50% of people who die by 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.

Common themes which could help to inform recommendations for change:

- The Impact on children of bereavement by suicide
- Self-Neglect
- Loss of hope
- Drug and Alcohol Use
- Mental Capacity and/ or 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

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.
- The review also 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.

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Professionals Briefing [continued...]

The recommendations for TSAB and MSP were:

- To request assurance from Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust that their updated computer system will inform professionals using the system of previous episodes of suicidal ideation with to inform current risk assessments and multi-agency escalation.
- Widely disseminated the antecedents of suicide generally & the antecedents of higher suicide risk groups
- To consider writing to the University of Manchester to propose a study of suicide in parents who have 'problems accessing their children' to build on the work of this thematic review
- To raise the issue of an apparent shortage of female psychiatric beds with the commissioners.
- To seek assurance from GMMH in respect of the steps being undertaken or planned to address unfilled vacancies.
- To seek assurance from Housing Providers that they have the policies, training and staff support in place to ensure that their staff demonstrate professional curiosity in their contacts with tenants in order to understand tenant needs and ensure that vulnerable tenants are offered appropriate support.
- To develop learning in how assessments and risk analysis are formulated specifically in relation to risk to self in respect of parents from whom their children have been removed.
- To commission the development of guidance for professionals on sensitive approaches to take in opening up conversations with clients about the removal of children and the impact this has had on their emotional health, wellbeing and mental health.
- To explore further means of understanding the lived experience of adults and the impact of trauma arising from loss of contact with children.
- To consider how to promote the view that struggling with parenting responsibilities is normal and that acknowledging that they are struggling or asking for support is not a sign of weakness.
- To promote the potential benefits of liaison between mental health services and social housing providers and seek assurance from Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust that practitioners are actively encouraged to liaise with a patient's housing provider as part of their multi agency risk management.
- To review the services currently commissioned to support parents when their child is taken into care which are intended to prevent future recurrent care proceedings with those same parents.
- To share this report with the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership and ask it to consider the commissioning of appropriate services for parents from whom their children are removed across the ten boroughs.
- To share this report with those responsible for the Trafford, Manchester and Greater Manchester Suicide Prevention Strategies and Action Plans.

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