

Oxford Safer Communities Partnership

Domestic Homicide Review

Executive Summary

Elira (June 2019)

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4 December 2020

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1. THE REVIEW PROCESS

This domestic homicide review was commissioned by Oxford Safer Communities Partnership following the death of Elira, an Albanian woman. Her husband was convicted of her murder and sentenced to serve a minimum of 19 years' imprisonment. The review examined the contact and involvement that agencies had with Elira, her husband and their two children in the eight months leading to her death.

1.1. Contributors to the review

The review was conducted in accordance with the Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (2016) under s.9 (3) Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). Individual management reviews and chronologies were requested from:

- General Practitioner
- School

Information reports and chronologies were requested from:

- Children's Social Care
- Thames Valley Police

All the authors of the individual management reviews and information reports were independent of the case i.e. they were not involved in the case and had no direct management responsibility for any of the professionals involved.

1.2. Review panel

The review panel comprised:

- Independent Chair and Author
- Independent Chair and Author
- Assistant Chief Executive, Oxford City Council
- Designated Nurse for Safeguarding, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Detective Chief Inspector, Thames Valley Police
- Domestic Homicide Review Lead, Oxford City Council
- Head of Service Family Solutions, Oxfordshire City Council
- Head of Service Front Door, Oxfordshire City Council
- Headteacher
- Service Manager A2 Dominion (Domestic Abuse Service)
- Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Officer

1.3. Author of the overview report

The chair and author of this review has been an independent consultant for 20 years. She specialises in violence against women and girls, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults with a particular focus on domestic abuse. She has no connection with any agency in Oxford; she has never been employed by any agency in Oxford. She has not completed any previous domestic homicide reviews for Oxford Safer Communities Partnership.

1.4. Terms of reference and key lines of enquiry

The review addressed both the 'generic issues' set out in the Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (2016) and the following specific issues identified in this particular case:

- What knowledge or information did your agency have that indicated Elira might be at risk of abuse, harm or domestic violence and how did your agency respond to this information? Was information shared and with which agencies?
- Did your agency directly ask either Elira or the perpetrator about domestic abuse? If so, what questions were asked and how did your agency respond to the information they provided?
- What knowledge or information did your agency have that indicated the perpetrator might be violent or abusive and how did your agency respond to this information? Was information shared? If so, with which agencies or professionals?
- Was there anything about the perpetrator's or Elira's presentation to suggest she was a victim of coercive control? Was there anything about the children's presentation to suggest that they were victims of coercive control?
- Was there anything about the children's presentation that indicated that they were witnessing domestic abuse or living in a household with domestic abuse? If so, how did your agency support the family?
- What did professionals understand about the cultural issues in the family (e.g. language, religion, ethnic origin) and how did these issues influence professional practice? Did professionals question Elira's or the perpetrator's understanding of English?

2. SUMMARY CHRONOLOGY

Elira and the perpetrator grew up in Albania. Their marriage was described as an "*arranged marriage*". They had been married for about 12 years and had two children. They lived in Italy for some years and owned a property there.

In 2018 they decided to move to the UK. The perpetrator came to the UK in August 2018 to find housing and employment. He found a two bedroomed family home to rent. He secured

employment as a cleaner. Elira and the children joined him in early October 2018. Elira also secured employment with the same company.

There were no reports to the police or any other agency of domestic abuse. Although as part of the investigation, their elder child told police that her parents sometimes argued. She had heard them arguing because the perpetrator wanted to look at Elira's phone which resulted in him smashing it. It appeared that he had accused Elira of having affairs and called her a "*whore*" (there was no evidence on her phone that she had any contact with other men). According to their elder child, another area of tension concerned their work. The perpetrator wanted to do the same job as Elira (checking parts) but he failed a test because his English was not as competent as his wife's.

Elira, the perpetrator and their children were bilingual, they spoke fluent Albanian and Italian. Their children also spoke very good English. Checks on the PNC (police national computer) and with Interpol indicated that neither Elira nor the perpetrator had any previous convictions.

In the early hours of a day in mid-June 2019 Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service responded to a report that a man had been stabbed by his wife. Police officers arrived to discover the perpetrator with substantial injuries and Elira with unsurvivable knife wounds.

The perpetrator was charged with Elira's murder and remanded into custody. His trial took place in December 2019. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to a minimum term of 19 years' imprisonment.

3. EMERGING THEMES

The main emerging themes in this review concerned:

- Migration and vulnerability
- Cultural differences
- Isolation
- Language barriers and access to services
- Arranged and forced marriage

4. CONCLUSION

This review highlighted the need for professionals within all agencies to have a good understanding of the cultural dimensions to domestic violence and abuse. It is possible that opportunistic questioning may help a woman disclose that they are suffering domestic violence and abuse. Even if she does not disclose anything the first time the issue is raised, it shows that the professional understands the issues and it may give her the confidence to disclose in the future. Professionals also need to be equipped to refer victims to specialist services. While domestic violence occurs across all ethnic groups, cultural differences do have an impact on some individuals' ability to access services and receive effective

intervention. Service providers therefore need to be aware that women from overseas (and those born in the UK from other backgrounds) may face additional barriers and have specific difficulties that need to be considered. Some women may wish to be referred to culturally specific services, whereas others may not wish to speak to someone from their own community. In these situations, having a choice is key.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. All Thames Valley Police frontline emergency response (ICR) officers to have access to chest seals within vehicle first aid kits.
- ii. Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service should consider the need for, and explore the possibility of, implementing a conference call or talk through facility.
- iii. Primary Care leads should review the options for supporting GP Practices to ensure that they are able to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 legislation (in terms of translation and interpretation services) in order to provide safe clinical care to their patients.
- iv. Oxford Safer Communities Partnership should ensure the recommendations from the Thames Valley VAWG BAMER¹ Project Report, where applicable, are embedded in the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan.
- v. Oxford Safer Communities Partnership should consider how best to ensure that the learning from domestic homicide reviews is coordinated and shared as widely as possible. The learning should be linked across the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adult Board as well as the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership. This should ensure that all practitioners have an understanding of:
 - Coercive control and the additional barriers facing Black and minoritised victims of domestic abuse
 - The themes that have emerged from local reviews

¹ Violence against women and girls (VAWG) Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) Project Report