

Rapid Reviews: Baby R



Background

- Baby R was born into a chaotic home with domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health concerns, Mum and Dad had had children removed from their care.
- There had been earlier child protection plans when Dad was violent to mum with children present, including when Mum was pregnant with Baby R.
- Children in the family demonstrated behaviours such as rocking and head banging when distressed.
- Children's services received referrals about shouting between parents and at the children, suspected substance misuse and drug dealing in the home.
- Baby R suffered injuries and Mum was deemed responsible for the injuries.

Mum and Dad's Background

- As a child Mum was vulnerable, she misused substances and was known to be at risk. She had her first child as a teenager and was diagnosed with anxiety and depression. There was evidence of cannabis and alcohol use during pregnancy.
- Mum made repeated disclosures of violence and coercive control, reporting she was fearful and isolated. Though she later retracted these reports Dad was known to be violent towards her.
- Dad had a history of domestic abuse being assessed at MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) as posing high risk to a previous partner. Though he denied all allegations professionals witnessed violent and aggressive behaviour.
- Dad had long term substance misuse issues and had significant mental health concerns including a history of suicidal ideation, self-harming and difficulty controlling his anger.
- After a period of stability, Dad experienced a significant deterioration in his mental health during the pandemic lockdown and he stopped taking his prescribed medication, using cannabis instead.

Learning

- We must consider the impact of a parent's own childhood and how this might have an impact on their ability to parent.
- When a parent denies perpetrating violence/abuse this should be seen as a failure to take responsibility for their actions and as evidence of the heightened risk they may pose
- Giving non-violent or non-coercive parents responsibility for keeping themselves and their children safe perpetuates the abuse.
- Critical enquiry and analysis of the interplay between parental substance misuse, violence/abuse and the impact on mental health and wellbeing of parents is essential to understand how they affect parent safety
- Robust reflective supervision can support practitioners to critically analyse and understand what the children's lives are like and direct professionals to see the risks of significant harm to a child. Click [here](#) for more information.
- Babies under one are particularly vulnerable with infancy and adolescence being one of the periods of greatest vulnerability to serious or fatal child maltreatment
- Lack of exploration of the root cause of Mum's mental health and wellbeing
- When Mum retracted allegations of violence and abuse professionals accepted this despite Mum offering very clear disclosures via social media and to SWs of physical and emotional abuse and coercive control

Learning

- Professional enquiry and challenge re: parental drug use and its impact could have given a more holistic understanding of the risks to the children
- Reflective supervision could have been used to critically analyse what the children's lives were like using child development research, and analysing how domestic abuse, substance misuse including in pregnancy, and mental health issues may impact on typical development can be used to understand what children's lives are like.
- It is essential to assess the Dad's/male carer's parenting capacity as well as Mum's.
- We need to hear what mothers who are victims of domestic abuse are telling professionals, especially when this is verified by other sources such as neighbours.
- Professionals need to be mindful of optimism bias when evaluating extensive involvement with families with complex problems, including repeat referrals to neglect, drug use, violence, and abuse. Professional optimism can result in plans ending early when no sustained change is evidenced.
- Chronologies should be used and professionals should receive reflective supervision to better understand the context and patterns of risk and how this impacts the children.
- Professionals need to engage with perpetrators of abuse, even when they deny the allegations.

Rapid Reviews: Baby R

