

Sarah – DHR - Summary, Key Issues and Recommendations

Sarah, aged 44, died by suicide in January 2023 following years of domestic abuse, mental health challenges, and substance misuse. Her life was shaped by early trauma, including sexual abuse and witnessing domestic violence. As an adult, she faced emotional abuse from her son Daniel (who had complex needs) and escalating abuse from her final partner, Michael. Despite frequent contact with multiple agencies, Sarah's vulnerabilities as a carer and victim of domestic abuse were not adequately addressed.

Key Issues

- **Domestic Abuse:** Sarah experienced child-to-parent abuse, coercive control, and physical violence. Michael's abuse included non-fatal strangulation and emotional manipulation.
- **Mental Health & Substance Use:** Sarah self-harmed and misused alcohol as coping mechanisms. Her mental health deteriorated after her mother's suicide and ongoing family stress.
- **Agency Involvement:** Multiple agencies (Police, CSC, ASC, CPFT, CGL) were involved but failed to coordinate effectively. MARAC meetings were inconsistent and lacked depth.
- **Voice of the Child:** Sophie and Lucas witnessed abuse and self-harm. Their voices were often unheard or dismissed by professionals.
- **Systemic Failures:** Lack of continuity in social workers, poor inter-agency communication, and missed opportunities for safeguarding and support.

Recommendations

1. Improve MARAC processes and commission Safelives review.
2. Ensure continuity in social work and improve case recording.
3. Recognise and respond to child-to-parent abuse.
4. Support carers at risk under the Care Act.
5. Enhance suicide prevention and referral pathways.
6. Embed voice of the child in assessments and plans.
7. Improve Out of Court Disposal processes and compliance.
8. Trial IDVA attendance with police at repeat DA incidents.
9. Use Clare's Law proactively to inform victims.
10. Conduct holistic assessments for families with complex needs

Link to full review [Domestic homicide review for Sarah: overview report - Cambridge Community Safety Partnership](#)