

Ava – DHR – Summary, Key Issues and Recommendations

This review examines the circumstances surrounding the death of “Ava,” a 39-year-old woman with a long history of domestic abuse, mental health difficulties, substance misuse and involvement with multiple agencies. Ava overdosed on heroin in October 2023 and remained in a coma until her death in January 2024. At the time, her partner “Len” was on police bail following allegations of assault and non-fatal strangulation against her.

Key Issues

- Failure to fully recognise and analyse coercive control, counter-allegations and the wider domestic abuse dynamics within the relationship.
- Fragmented multi-agency working, with poor use of chronologies and inconsistent information sharing between services.
- Missed opportunities to apply safeguarding and legal protections, including restraining orders and effective court interventions.
- Inconsistent domestic abuse risk assessments, including inappropriate downgrading of high-risk incidents.
- Lack of specialist local perpetrator programmes and inconsistent domestic abuse training across agencies.
- Insufficient long-term and trauma-informed mental health support, particularly during pregnancy and following child removal.
- High staff turnover and repeated changes of social worker undermined continuity, trust and effective intervention.
- Limited planning and support around the significant risks associated with the permanent removal of children, including suicide, overdose and escalating domestic abuse risk.

Recommendations

- Introduce mandatory domestic abuse training across agencies, including coercive control, counter-allegations, trauma-informed practice and use of chronologies.
- Develop consistent multi-agency domestic abuse chronologies and improve information sharing between services and safeguarding forums.
- Strengthen processes for legal protections, including use of restraining orders and specialist domestic abuse court arrangements.
- Ensure all high-risk domestic abuse cases are appropriately referred to and discussed at MARAC.
- Improve integrated support for individuals experiencing overlapping domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse issues.
- Establish enhanced safety planning and wraparound support for parents before and after child removal proceedings.
- Introduce regular multi-agency “Stop and Think” meetings for complex high-risk cases to allow reflective analysis and coordinated planning.
- Improve continuity of professional involvement and oversight for vulnerable families experiencing multiple complex needs.

Link to full review - [Community Safety Partnership](#)