

North Somerset Safeguarding Adults
Board

Lunch and Learn Webinar

Domestic Homicide Review and
Romance Fraud

Domestic Homicide Review and Romance Fraud



Introductions:

- Hannah Gray - Domestic Abuse and VAWG Lead
- Claire Bounds – Fraud Protect Officer
- Liz Langson - Safeguarding Adults Board Manager

Today:

- What is a Domestic Homicide Review? (case review and Themes)
- safeguarding adults lens
- What is Romance Fraud, red flags, what the police do, If you come across it as a frontline practitioner, would you do? What service are there for victims?

Domestic homicide reviews - the background

- **Domestic Homicide Reviews** (DHRs) were established on a **statutory basis** under Section 9 (3) of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). This provision came into force on 13th April 2011. Latest Statutory Guidance December 2016.
- In May 2024 the Home Office commenced a review of the current Guidance and launched a consultation, the results of which are still pending. One significant change coming from this is the change of name from DHR to DARDR – Domestic Abuse Related Death Review. Although, DHR is still being widely used at the present time.

Domestic homicide reviews

- the purpose

- **Domestic Violence Homicide Reviews** (DHRs) are commissioned by CSPs within local authorities and conducted by a panel of local agencies representatives and chaired by a suitably qualified, independent person.
- The purpose of the review is for local agencies to consider collectively events and contacts with the victim, perpetrator and potentially wider family members in the time leading up to the death in order to identify potential barriers for victims to seek support and access services, highlight gaps or failings identify examples of good practice and key learning, which can be turned into tangible action taken by local agencies to ensure victims are protected and ultimately prevent future harm and deaths.
- The focus is very much on a system-wide review rather than focus on individual agencies or staff conduct – there are other mechanisms for this. DHRs do not focus on blame and will be separate to any criminal justice process, inquest or other statutory review, but may run alongside this.

Details & Key Features	Learning & Outcomes
Female 61 years old, employed, internet dating, independent, no known care and support needs.	Vulnerability despite no care & support needs. Loneliness, isolation in later life. Training for primary care staff re routine enquiry
Victim had no prior agency contact or known to services other than routine GP appts. Some issues re alcohol and depression.	North Somerset online dating safety toolkit produced. Importance of employer DA support & DA Champions within the workplace, local awareness-raising re DA
Partner RSO life sentence and released from prison in 2013 on life licence moved to Somerset from Cheshire, 2 separate Probation services managed him, Covid	IOPC investigation ongoing. Increased training on challenging disguised compliance and professional bias re older offenders.
Barriers to reporting from family, friends, work colleagues 'hidden in plain sight'	Vital role that friends and associates can play in providing information and insights about relationships. This is especially so in circumstances when agency involvement is limited.
Evidence of ongoing contact with other women, 2 warnings by probation officers given for this.	Probation – further training on professional bias re generational use of technology

Safeguarding adults

- Anyone can fall victim to a romance scam, as we have seen in DHR case.
- However vulnerable adults are particularly at risk of fraud and scams which are often linked to financial abuse and exploitation.
- Coercion and Control is a key part of these forms of abuse
- The grooming process is often hidden in plain sight and this type of abuse can target anyone, although currently is more commonly affecting older women.
- Perpetrators identify victims through a range of methods and groom them.

Predatory Marriage

Predatory Marriage

- Holds an element of romance fraud
- A predatory marriage is where a vulnerable person is exploited by someone who coerces them to marry for financial benefit or to inherit their estate. It is an emerging form of exploitation targeting vulnerable older adults. It can happen anywhere and to anyone, but those who lack mental capacity are especially vulnerable.
- ***Joan Blass was 91 with severe dementia and terminal cancer. After her death in March 2016, we found that a much younger man, age 68, had secretly married her five months previously. She never knew that she was married. [Our Story – Predatory Marriage UK.](#)***
- If there is a power of attorney, the attorney is not notified if the victim marries

Romance fraud: safeguarding adults case example

Mr D is 68 years old and has long standing history of depression and anxiety and recently has been experience cognitive decline.

He is divorced and has 3 grown children.

He struggles with the absence of a relationship and wants to meet a partner.

Mr D uses social media to talk to others.

He has experiences romance fraud on 2 occasions and although he is aware of the situation, he is still in contact with the people who have scammed him, and when asked why said he didn't know.

The emotional impact to Mr D was so high that he tried to end his life.

Romance fraud: safeguarding adults case example

Raise a safeguarding concern with the local authority

Referral into FraudProtect@avonandsomerset.police.uk (they will discuss what they would do in their example later)

Being professionally curious

Multi-agency work

Adults voice and views – consider advocacy

Social Prescribing

Social engagement to reduce her isolation/loneliness - meaningful real connections

Understand the Coercion and Control that comes with this form of exploitation

Romance fraud



- Contact typically starts on dating site or social media platform
- Quick to confess their love
- Range of excuses as to why they can't meet
- Similar back stories which often involve being overseas
- Always a new reason why they need money



Key signs that should raise your suspicions



Being more secretive



Struggling to pay bills



Mentions of an online love interest/friendship



Receiving frequent phone calls



Becomes defensive when questioned



Diminishing or changing level of self-care



Frequent trips to the bank



Lack of food in the house

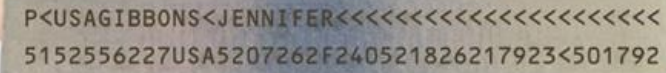
The Impact of Romance Fraud

- Emotional element with victims being misled regarding their partner
- Loneliness can lead to victimisation
- Grooming/brainwashing
- Encouragement of victim to be secretive
- Repeatedly targeted
- Isolation from family and/or support network



**Clear parallels with
domestic abuse**

Further research conducted into any information that shows contact is fraudulent i.e. businesses or organisations



Exposing Scams



9/29/2024 9/29/2024 9/29/2024
9/29/2024 09/29/2024



Unknown Suspect Romance Fraud Case Study

Background

- Joan is a widow who suffered a stroke, leaving her nonverbal
- Her son completed an Action Fraud on her behalf after becoming aware of an online romance

Fraud

- Some simple research was conducted to support our claims that the victim was not speaking to a man in the military and the man in the images was a bit-part actor from the USA
- This information was provided to the victim during the visit

Visit

- Fraud Protect Officers visited her home address, having conducted research into the profile
- Communicated via iPad
- Scam exposure and extensive support and protect advice

Ongoing Support

- She allowed us to contact her son to update him
- Adult Social Care and the memory team became involved
- Victim Support referral, BRAG and VVN completed

Known Suspect Romance Fraud Case Study

Background

- Martin lives alone and regularly used sex workers, eventually developing friendships with some of them, one of whom then began to defraud him
- Bank reported fraud after noticing concerning frequency of multiple payments from Martin's account

Fraud

- The female involved claimed to be struggling to afford food and stated that she needed money to escape sex work
- She made proclamations of love and even spoke of marriage with Martin to continue his interest in her

Visit

- Research was conducted on the female which showed that she actually owned multiple homes and was not struggling financially
- Fraud Protect Officers attended Martin's home address and broke this news to him

Ongoing Support

- The incident was passed to the police force where the female suspect lives, with research provided on her possible links to OCGs
- Martin was also provided with ongoing support from Fraud Protect, Victim Support and the bank

Safeguarding actions

Following contact with the victim Fraud Protect make contact with:

The Bank:

Vulnerable Victim
Notification sent to
update

Victim Support:

Charity with fraud
specialists who
contact the victim

Other Services:

i.e. social services,
local support
services

Any immediate safeguarding concerns are dealt with as an emergency

The Fraud Reporting Process



- The process of reporting and managing fraud differs from other crime types
- Fraud has no boundaries
- Fraud *was* reported like any other crime and inputted onto the force system, but a review revealed that this was not best practice
- This is where the National Fraud Reporting Centre, Action Fraud, was set up, which now receives all reports of fraud from victims in England and Wales
- Reports can either be made over the phone or online. You can also make a report on someone's behalf if you have their consent

Telephone: 0300 123 2040

Online: <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

- Action Fraud is the public facing reporting tool, and staff are employed by the City of London Police
- All Action Fraud reports are then sent to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), based within the City of London Police
- The NFIB use the intelligence to identify offenders and identify emerging crime types. They decide whether further investigation should take place and disseminate as needed

The Fraud Protect Team and Our Work

The Vulnerable Victims of Fraud Coordinator (VVF)	Fraud Protect Officers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess Action Fraud reports for vulnerable* victims in the A&S area and determine the response required• Provide crime prevention advice via letter, email, or phone and fraud protect material• If identified as particularly vulnerable, a visit from a Fraud Protect Officer may be appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A role to help provide a proactive response to fraud rather than reactive• Identify fraud early and work closely with key stakeholders to help reduce the impact• Educate and raise awareness of fraud through meetings, seminars, conferences and other platforms to reduce the risk of fraud• Produce crime prevention material to help decrease the threat of fraud• Assess vulnerability and provide enhanced responses

FraudProtect@avonandsomerset.police.uk – Email to refer for support

* The team only work Mon-Fri office hours and therefore anything which is deemed an immediate risk/safeguarding concern should be escalated in the usual ways *

Support Services



Lighthouse

- A team of staff from the police and victim support organisations, working together to guide, advise and support victims and witnesses. Although they do not accept external referrals, their website is useful to search for various support services.
- <https://www.lighthousevictimcare.org/>



Victim Support

- An independent charity providing free and confidential support to people affected by crime in England and Wales.
- <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>



Neighborhood Watch

- Victims can find a local scheme/support, and access advice about scams.
- <https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/crime-prevention/crime-types/scams>

Reading and Resources

- For more information about predatory marriage visit <https://www.predatorymarriage.uk/>
- [Predatory marriage - Devon Safeguarding Adults Partnership](#)
- [Predatory Marriage UK – Reforming marriage laws and procedures to protect people with dementia](#)
- [If you think only lonely middle-aged women ‘fall for’ romance scams, you might be the perfect victim | Becky Holmes | The Guardian](#)
- [‘He spent thousands’: how a bank team tries to rescue scam victims | Scams | The Guardian](#)
- National Scams Team. There is currently a national taskforce (STRICT - Scams Team Research Innovation & Collaboration Taskforce)
- [Friends Against Scams – Home](#)
- [Domestic homicide review | North Somerset Council](#)
- [32609 Stay safe with onne dating branding toolkit.indd](#)
- Outlines some of the most common scams - <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/media/32291114/little-book-of-big-scams.pdf>
- Stop! Think Fraud - A national campaign about taking that moment to pause and think before responding to any text, email or phone call - [Stop! Think Fraud - How to stay safe from scams](#)
- Action Fraud - The fraud reporting centre, but their website also includes a lot of useful resources - <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

Q & A