

**Domestic Homicide Reviews in  
England and Wales: Exploring  
challenges and opportunities  
through the lens of LGBT+  
domestic homicide**

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## Overview

- Background to the Domestic Homicide Review (DHRs) process in England and Wales
- Overview of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) as it affects Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT+) victims
- Exploration of DHRs relating to LGBT\* victims
- Discussion of implications



United Kingdom

SCOTLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

ENGLAND

WALES

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Calls to introduce DHRs

Consulted on the implementation of DHRs in 2018

Legislation in 2004

Pemberton Review (Walker et al. 2008)

Implemented in 2011 (Home Office 2011)

Most recent statutory guidance (Home Office 2016b)

Approx. 500 DHRs completed by 2018

## Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (DVCV) Act 2004

*“means a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by—*

- (a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or*
- (b) a member of the same household as himself,*

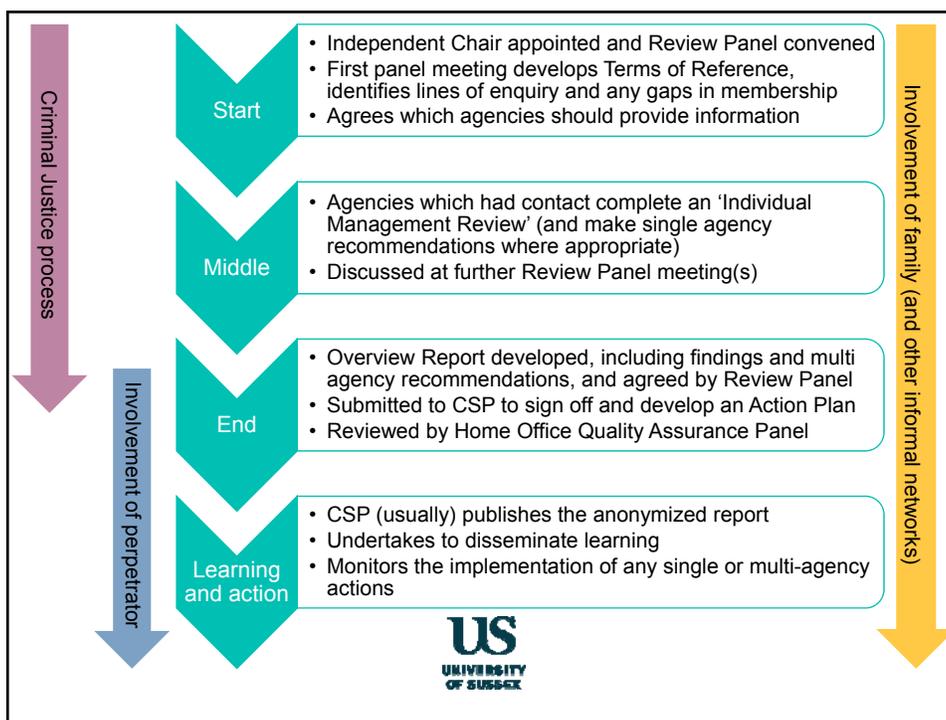
*held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death”*

## DHR purpose

- Establish what lessons are to be learned about the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims
- Identify what is expected to change as a result
- Apply these lessons to service responses (including changes policies and procedures)
- Improve service responses to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively
- Improved understanding
- Highlight good practice



DHRs are commissioned at a local level by a 'Community Safety Partnership' (CSP)



## LGBT+ DVA

- Prevalence appears at least as high as for heterosexual women (Greenwood et al 2002; Duke and Davidson 2009; Messinger 2017)
- For trans people some studies indicate prevalence may be higher (The Scottish Trans Alliance 2010; Campo and Tayton 2015)
- LGBT+ victims can experience unique forms of abuse underpinned by gender and sexual norms (Shelton: 2018), including 'identity abuse' (Ristock 2002)



- Donovan & Hester (2014) describe the impact of the 'public story' of DVA on LGBT+ victims – argue it leads to a lack of recognition and a 'gap of trust'
- LGBT+ victims are underrepresented in domestic abuse services (SafeLives 2018)
- More likely seek support from 'informal' sources of help and support, in particular counsellors/therapists and from friends (Donovan & Hester 2014; Messinger 2017)



Do DHRs hear,  
see or speak about  
LGBT+ victims of  
domestic  
homicide?



## “Speak no evil”

- Last few decades have seen an increasing visibility and presence of LGBT+ people in public sphere
- Yet little considered in DVA policy e.g. Violence against Women and Girls strategy (HM Government 2016)
- Albeit recent strategy refresh notes LGBT+ people “face unique experiences” (HM Government 2019a)
- An associated document on male victim’s identifies “structural, cultural, individual/interpersonal factors” that affect GBT+ survivors (HM Government 2019b)



- While increased visibility is welcome, these document struggle to 'place' LGBT+ survivors
- LGBT+ survivors framed as an add on, or situated within a heteronormative gender binary – an uneasy fit
- This unease has been highlighted in the literature (Island and Letellier 1991; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002; Workman and Dune 2019)
- For DHRs, statutory guidance makes a single reference to LGBT+ victims



## “See no evil”

- Decision making around DHRs is opaque, especially where a CSP decides not to conduct a DHR
- Exacerbated by:
  - Challenges of definition (absence of shared understanding)
  - A lack of transparency (limited reporting requirements)
- Some homicides not subject to a DHR:
  - Unclear how many areas consider suicides
  - If the deceased and offender were 'not intimate enough'
  - Where the deceased and the offender relationship was 'not close enough' or not in the 'right kind of relationship'



# Cassie Hayes



Cassie Hayes, right, with partner Laura Williams  
Source: *The Sun*

- In January 2018, Cassie Hayes was murdered by the ex-partner (Andrew Burke) of her girlfriend (Laura Williams)
- Burke had made threats to Hayes, including threats to kill himself or her (in January 2017). Known to Police for an allegation of harassment (May 2017)
- Also convicted of harassment against Williams, and was on bail at time of murder
- Police described the case as "domestic-related"
- CSP did not conduct a DHR



# CSP decision

- Decided the case "did not fit the criteria" (Sefton 2019)
- Presumably, the reason was 'relational distance' (Dobash & Dobash 2012) i.e. the link was non intimate and indirect
- Technically this is consistent with the statutory guidance
- Yet, fails to consider abuse towards Hayes and Williams, with Hayes being a 'corollary' victim (Smith et al. 2014)
- Missed opportunity? Example of violence by ex heterosexual partners (Herek et al. 2002; Rose 2003)



## West London murders

- In 2014 and 2015, Anthony Walgate, Gabriel Kovari, Daniel Whitworth and Jack Taylor were murdered by Stephen Port
- Series of errors in police investigations into deaths
- A voluntary sector agency made a DHR referral
- CSP deferred decision, choosing to wait for outcome of investigation into police response



## CSP decision

- Queried if a DHR was appropriate
- In doing so focused on question of intimacy – made a distinction between “intimate personal relationship” and “sexual exploitation, casual or other” (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 2019)
- Does not appear to have considered Kovari’s relationship with Port – while this was unclear, Kovari had moved in and Port had described him as his “flatmate” (i.e. a ‘member of same household’)



## Theoretical approach

- DHRs as a site of emergence for an object of knowledge (Foucault 1972)
- DHRs, and the policy context in which they emerged, need further study – should not be taken for granted as a ‘good’
- So consideration of how a specific problem (LGBT+ domestic homicide) is constructed and how a particular solution is generated through the DHR process



## “Hear no evil”

- So far, have identified nine ‘LGBT’ domestic homicides between 2012 and 2017
- Of these, seven have been published
- Six subject to thematic and discourse analysis (one excluded from analysis)
- All male victims, five killed by another man
- **Work in progress so early findings!**



## The center to the margins

- Sexual orientation primarily referenced in context of relationship status, otherwise tended to be oblique
- Focus was usually on the individual
- Little exploration of significance and/or impact of sexual orientation e.g. only 2 DHRs (01 and 08) discussed barriers to reporting
- Rarely considered relational, community or societal context (Heise 1998)



*'Jason was openly homosexual and had experienced bullying and harassment because of this'*  
(DHR 03, p.5)



## Recognizing intimacy

- Three of the six DHRs identified a lack of clarity in relationship status (DHR 1, 3 and 6)
- Five of the six DHRs identified missed opportunities because the victim was a man and / or in a same sex relationship (DHR 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8)

“Four organisations...acknowledged that ... being a man in a same sex relationship may have hindered him from being recognised as a victim of domestic abuse” (DHR 2, p.33)



## Making the case



## Provision

- Only one area had a LGBT+ domestic abuse service
- In one other area, a mainstream domestic abuse provider had run a 9-month pilot but:
 

“ ... found it very difficult to secure engagement from victims and during that period only one person identified themselves as being in a non-heterosexual relationship” (DHR 08, p.12)
- Consistent with national findings about limited specialist provision (Magić and Kelley 2019)



## Implications

- DHRs are a process of knowledge production
- Important to understand discursive practices through which knowledge of homicides is produced, not least because of impact on policy, practice and 'public story'
- Yet, some have already warned of the risk of a 'narrow scope' (Mullane 2017) to DHRs, rather than a 'wide angled' lens (Websdale 2010)
- Might marginalization, individualization and heteronormative discourses make this more likely in LGBT+ homicides?



## Best practice responses

- Recognize what changes are required to meet the needs of LGBT+ survivors (including resources)
- Training on LGBT+ DVA *and* on discriminatory practice
- Tailored service provision (including tools, as well as models of work)
- Targeted awareness raising and information materials
- Fostering an environment that is welcoming to LGBT+ clients and staff (Donovan and Barnes Forthcoming; Messinger 2017)



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