

Background

In June 2020, 15-year-old Amy disclosed that her father had been sexually abusing her since the previous January.

Amy's father is a Registered Sex Offender (RSO), having been convicted of sexual activity with a 15-year-old girl and the use of drugs were a recognised factor in the offending. He was released from prison on licence in with conditions including not to reside in the same household or have unsupervised contact with children under the age of 16 without prior approval.

On his release he contacted Amy's mother asking for contact with Amy. Her mother was not informed by professionals on the exact nature of the offence which the father had been convicted for, and the father had given his version of events which minimised its seriousness. Amy wasn't aware of why he was in prison.

Amy started to see her father under supervision however he started to abuse her once he got his own accommodation and their visits no longer had to be supervised. She would spend up to three nights per week with him and as lockdown came into place in March 2020, Amy spent several weeks with her father. During this time the abuse continued, and he would buy her alcohol and drugs, including cannabis, cocaine, ketamine and 'pills'.

The intrafamilial context to sexual abuse:

The National Probation Service (NPS) Assessor stated the father posed a risk to female children under 16 years of age but did the original offence suggested this risk extended to his own biological children

The original offence was against a 15-year-old who was known to him and where he had been living with the family. This along with his limited contact with Amy at the time should have been considered and the assertion of no risk posed should have been challenged

There was a view that the distinction between sexual abuse and familial sexual abuse was a false one. In this case when considering risk and a recognition, a training requirement for professionals arose around sexual abuse and in particular how to identify and risk assess the potential for abuse.

Impact of Covid-19:

The Covid-19 lockdown had an impact on the continuing abuse and the ability for Amy to disclose what was happening to her. It meant she was spending extended periods at her father's address, a single room accommodation, and this added to her isolation and the ability for her father to continue his offending.



One Minute Guide

Learning from a Local Safeguarding Practice Review - Amy

August 2021

Use of drugs:

Use of drugs by the father is a significant factor which caused concern to Amy and her mother and featured in the original offence. When it became known that he was using drugs again an additional licence condition was added but risk of contact with Amy was not re-assessed.

Providing Amy with drugs was used to facilitate abuse as it had in his previous offence. Amy feels that had she been provided more information regarding her father's previous offending, at an earlier stage, she would have been better equipped to identify the similarities in his behaviour.

Interagency working in understanding the risk of sexual abuse:

The first referral made by the NPS 3 months before the father's release date was advised by Childrens Services as being premature. This referral should have been progressed at this stage as statutory guidance allows up to 45 working days and this would have been timely for the father's release and avoided the confusion which ensued.

Unassessed contact, although supervised at the early stage, allowed the father to manipulate the situation. There were no measures in place to monitor how the contact was being undertaken and Amy felt no professional sat her down and discussed her wishes. Assessments were not child centred or holistic in the consideration of risk factors or of relevant information from the past, such as domestic abuse between Amy's mother and father.

Overall, there needed to be better communication between the MASH and NPS on referral to fully understand the concerns, and thereafter between NPS, the police and Children Services to fully understand and assess the risk.

Practitioners assessment of parent/carers ability to protect where there is coercion or control.

Amy's mother states that she was not able at the time to resist her father's requests for more contact with Amy, saying she was manipulated by the father who offered her support at a time she was vulnerable.

The father was keen to establish a relationship with his daughter his motivation for this contact was not explored or challenged.

The definition of supervised contact was never discussed with the mother and lacked structure, being left to interpretation. Much clearer boundaries and support for the family should have been in place

Voice of the child being captured and informing assessment:

Discussion with Amy for this review found her to be a very open young person who was able to talk about her experiences in the hope that it would assist professionals to prevent what happened to her occurring to other young people.

During the assessment in 2019 Amy was spoken to once on her own and once in the presence of her mother. She does not recall her views on contact with her father being sought or information regarding his previous sexual offending being openly discussed. The assessment also did not focus on the trauma caused to Amy by the death of her sibling whom she had discovered.

Disclosure of the abuse finally occurred when she told her boyfriend, who she trusted and recognised she was in a loving relationship with. She also had a desire to protect her siblings as her father became more ensconced within the family.

Learning:

- Distinction between familial and non-familial sexual abuse should not be drawn when considering risk.
- Professionally and appropriately challenge assertions regarding risk.
- Where an offender transitions from one area to another, the receiving area should ensure there is an up to date risk assessment, reflecting any new information.
- It is imperative child contact assessments are robust, child centred and holistic.
- MAPPA is an appropriate 'vehicle' for multi-agency offender and risk management where contact with children is concerned.
- Agencies need to be aware of the manipulative nature of sex offenders.
- When considering contact issues with families, give full information of offending.
- All parties should be absolutely clear as to what supervised means.
- Where contact with a Registered Sex Offender is supervised or unsupervised there should be regular welfare checks with the children or young person to ensure they remain central to the situation and every opportunity is given for any concerns to be raised by them.

Recommendations:

- Build on and promote the Partnership Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021-23.
- Review how child contact with Registered Sex Offenders (RSO) is assessed and managed. This should include: A clear and agreed understanding of when a referral for assessment should be; Child centred and holistic assessments; ongoing safeguarding measures built in to protect young people; Consider the use of the MAPPA framework; Providing full information to enable informed decisions regarding the risk; Clearly defined 'supervised contact'; Sharing information with other professionals who have an active role in the child's life and need to be sighted on the risk.
- Promote the role of Child Sexual Abuse Lead Professional.
- The National Probation Service and West Midlands Police should work together to ensure that prison licence conditions are complimentary to Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and any pre-existing orders.
- The National Probation Service should promote the Effective Practice briefing on Intra-familial Child Sex Abuse.
- Review how information is shared with schools to assist them when safeguarding the wellbeing of students. This will assist vulnerability assessments for periods when children and young people may not be in school.

Key Contacts and Further Information

- [Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- [Sexual Abuse Strategy](#)
- [Child Sexual Exploitation information pages and Indicator Tool](#)
- [Read the full report here](#)