COVENTRY CITY
COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Domestic Abuse Related Death Report (DARDR)

Overview Report

Name of Deceased: Aaliyah

Date of Death: October 2021

Independent Chair and Author: Carolyn Carson

Report Completed: December 2025

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“My sister Aaliyah, the youngest of 7, or as she was always called, my little sister.

We did everything together. From playing and climbing, collecting apples for our garden den to walking to school together. For as long as I can remember we were always together.

Aaliyah was funny, she loved hard and hurt harder. Growing up she loved a tv show from Eastenders to Sunset Beach. She loved books, she was an avid reader from such a young age, she loved Sydney Sheldon books and watching movies. We loved the movie Con Air so much, Con became her nickname. Hers for me was Fatty, she still called it me. The only one that still did even in our later years.

Losing our dad suddenly at only 14 for her, was tremendously difficult, more so than I realised at the time. We all deal with grief differently, so we tried in our own ways. For Aaliyah, it was rebellious at points, not channelling her emotions in what was perhaps the best ways in situations.

Aaliyah had her fair share of trying times and difficult situations. At times it was hard to get through to her, she held onto so much but always wanted to do and be better. She tried, however long it lasted, she tried. And now she doesn't have the opportunity to try any longer.

Instead, she leaves her child, a daily reminder of her. From cheeky quips to the glasses – her child will forever be a blessing and a connection to my little sister.”

1 Introduction

1.1 This report into a death in unexplained circumstances examines agency responses and support given to Aaliyah, a resident of Coventry, prior to travelling to Pakistan where she died unexpectedly, in October 2021.

1.2 In addition to agency involvement the review will also examine the past to identify any relevant background or trail of abuse before the death, whether support was accessed within the community and whether there were any barriers to accessing support. By taking a holistic approach the review seeks to identify appropriate solutions to make the future safer for those subject to domestic abuse.

1.3 The Review Chair and domestic abuse related death review (DARDR), panel send their sincere condolences to Aaliyah's child, family, and friends. Aaliyah's family have driven the decision to conduct this review and have chosen the pseudonyms used in this report.

1.4 The victim in this case is Aaliyah, a British citizen born in England to first generation Pakistani immigrants. At the time of her death, she was 35 years old and separated from her husband Sauron, a citizen of rural Pakistan with whom she had been married for 8 years. Aaliyah had travelled to Pakistan for family reasons and whilst there, she stated her intention to divorce Sauron, her first cousin with whom they shared the same family. On the day Aaliyah made plans to return home, she fell unexpectedly ill and died on the way to hospital. She did not reach hospital but was returned to the family village and buried quickly in line with Pakistani, rural, cultural tradition. There was no investigation into the circumstances of Aaliyahs very sudden death in Pakistan, nor by the British Police as requested by the family at the time. In consequence, it has not been possible to establish a cause of death, to date.

1.5 The key purpose for undertaking domestic abuse related death reviews is to enable lessons to be learned from homicides where a person is killed as a result of domestic violence and abuse. In Aaliyahs case, it is not possible to state how she died and so it cannot be stated that she was subject to a domestic abuse related death. However, due to Aaliyahs family fighting to get her voice heard and circumstances examined, Coventry City Community Safety Partnership agreed to undertake this review. This was a very positive course of action in support of the family despite the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR), definition for when to conduct a statutory DHR[1], not being met due to it not being possible to prove Aaliyah died from violence, abuse or neglect.

[1] Under section 9(1) of the 2004 Act, domestic homicide review 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 child to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or (person a member of the same household as himself, held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.

1.6 For potential lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in the lead up to Aaliyah choosing to travel to Pakistan. Most importantly, an understanding of what needs to change to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future. This review is seeking to examine the role of agencies who encountered Aaliyah and her husband Sauron, to establish if there are any lessons to be learned as a result of any engagement, or to identify missed opportunities for agency engagement.

1.7 Timescales

- Aaliyah died in October 2021and Aaliyahs family unable to repatriate her body or commence an investigation in Pakistan. Also, the UK police declined to open an investigation into Aaliyah's death.
- On the 20th of April 2023, on behalf of Aaliyahs family. AAFDA[2] approached the Coventry Community Safety Partnership (CCSP), to request a DARDR.
- On the 13th of July 2023, the CCSP agreed to conduct a DARDR.
- June 2024: Replacement DHR Chair engaged following withdrawal through illness of initial Independent Chair; and DARDR fully recommenced.

1.8 Confidentiality

The findings of each review are confidential. Information is available only to participating professionals and their line managers. To ensure confidentiality, the victim of the Domestic Abuse Related Death Review is referred to as Aaliyah and her husband, Sauron, as chosen by Aaliyahs family.

2 Terms of Reference

2.1 For effective learning the scoping period for this review was agreed to be from July 2018 until Aaliyahs death in October 2021, although due to the nature of the circumstances of Aaliyahs death, the scope will extend to cover the events after her death. The specific areas for consideration within this DARDR were agreed to be:

Where the definition set out in this paragraph has been met, then a Domestic Homicide Review should be undertaken.

[2] AAFDA: Advocacy after fatal domestic abuse: https://aafda.org.uk/public/help-for-families AAFDA draw on personal and professional experience of major criminal justice processes like Domestic Homicide Reviews, and other related inquiries to provide emotional, practical and specialist peer support to those left behind after fatal domestic homicide.

- An examination as to whether interventions and services offered were appropriate and whether they had sufficient focus/appreciation of Domestic Abuse.
- Consideration of how risks were identified, the changing risks and effective management of them.

- The effectiveness of information sharing between agencies.

- The application of professional curiosity of professionals involved with the family, including a consideration of bias, assumptions and the use of language.

- How agencies considered the risk of honour-based violence, potentially due to Aaliyah's substance use, choice to divorce and criminal prosecution.

Exploration of the case through an appropriate cultural lens and consideration as to whether agencies were culturally competent in the issues and risks in this case

2.2 Aaliyah's family[3] were involved in the development of the Terms of Reference.

3 Methodology

3.1 The Serious Incident Learning Process (SILP) model of review was commissioned to be used within this domestic abuse related death review process. SILP is a learning model, tried and tested in safeguarding reviews for both children's and adult's cases, including domestic homicide reviews, and takes account of the DHR principles enshrined in government guidance. The process seeks to engage front line staff and their managers in reviewing cases, together with statutory partners and specialist agencies, to focus on why those involved acted in a certain way at the time. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to include practitioners in this review due to agencies not being able to provide resources and time, having 13 additional open DHR's within Coventry, currently.

3.2 Resource Implications for local authorities managing DARDR's are acknowledged by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in their report 'Learning from Loss[4]', published in July 2025. In Coventry, it has been a challenge to ensure full panel attendance by key statutory agencies, and particularly the police. Their workload has prevented a timely completion of the DARDR and the postponement of the learning event, causing additional distress to Aaliyah's brother who had agreed to attend. It has also delayed a timely completion of the

[3] Aaliyah's brother involved whilst supported by AAFDA
[4] https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Learning-from-Loss.pdf

Overview Report. Non-statutory agencies have fully engaged however, and this is acknowledged and appreciated, together with acknowledgement of their frustrations at the lack of statutory agency attendance at times.

3.3 Once the review was commissioned an initial scoping meeting and first panel meeting was held, where agency representation, terms of reference, the scoping period and the project plan were agreed. The meeting schedule was as follows:

- 1st Scoping Meeting (13/07/2023)
- Meeting with victim's brother
- 2nd Scoping Meeting (February 2024)
- Authors Briefing (March 2024)
- Panel Meeting (March 2025)
- Panel / Learning Event (March 2025)
- Recall / Panel (August 2025)
- Sign-off Meeting (November 2025)

3.4 Whilst applying the principles of the SILP methodology, the independent chair and author has followed the Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews[5], as amended in December 2016. Importantly, the model has incorporated a sufficient number of meetings, panel and with individual agencies, in this case for the panel to effectively support the review and to discharge their duties, albeit with time delays.

4 Involvement of Family, Friends and Wider Community

4.1 Aaliyah's family have received much support from AAFDA who have been with them throughout the process. Aaliyah is one of 7 siblings. Her youngest brother has been the representative to the review process. Her youngest sister has provided the pen picture used at the start of this report. Aaliyahs family have worked very hard to ensure Aaliyah has a voice, supported by AAFDA, as has this review, with their support.

4.2 Aaliyah's brother has represented the wider family and engaged directly with both the previous Chair, from whom he was made aware of the terms of reference, and with the current Chair who has ensured he is updated regularly personally, with the support of AAFDA. Aaliyah's brother has met the review panel and attended a panel / learning event in person and attended all subsequent panel meetings held on-line. He has received all versions of the

[5] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80be88e5274a2e87dbb923/DHR-Statutory-Guidance-161206.pdf

report to review. His engagement and support for the review are much appreciated.

4.3 Sadly, Aaliyahs wider network of friends and neighbours did not wish to engage with the review and due to no initial police investigation, there are no supporting witness statements available to the review.

4.4 I**nvolvement of Sauron**

The review has not been able to have any contact with Aaliyah's estranged husband, Sauron mainly because there is no record of his whereabouts and the family have lost touch with him. Sauron has not had contact with agencies post Aaliyah's death and so there are no records to assist locate him.

5 DARDR Panel and Contributors[6] to the Review

5.1

NAME	AGENCY	STATUS	IMR or Summary Report
Carolyn Carson	Independent	Chair and Author	
Jayne Ross	Coventry City Council	Domestic Abuse Programme Manager	
Mahdiyyah Khalifa	Coventry City Council	Population Health Policy Project	
	West Midlands Police	Panel Member	IMR
	NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board- Primary Care	Panel Member Report Author	IMR
	Probation Service	Panel Member	Contributed relevant information and professional expertise through panel attendance.
	Change, Grow, Live	Panel Member Report Author	Summary

[6] Following discussion at panel meetings, Coventry would prefer to omit the names of individual panel members in line with the proposed changes to DHR guidance due later in 2025.

	Coventry City Councils Children's Service	Panel Member	IMR
	Coventry Haven	Panel Member Report	Summary
	University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust	Panel Member Report	Summary
	Panahghar	Panel Member	Provided specialist professional insight
	Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust	Panel Member	Contributed relevant information and professional expertise through panel attendance.

6 Author and Chair of the DARDR and Overview Report

6.1 Carolyn Carson is an Independent Safeguarding Reviewer and has undertaken DHR's across England and Wales since 2013. Carolyn retired as a Police Superintendent in 2011, having specialised extensively in Safeguarding through her service, at both a practitioner and senior manager level. Carolyn served in, and remains based in, Leicestershire. As such, she has not worked directly with any of the agencies involved with Aaliyah and agencies local to Coventry City. Carolyn successfully completed the revised Chairs training provided by AAFDA in October 2024 and is registered with the Home Office as a qualified DHR Reviewer.

7 Parallel Reviews

7.1 There are no parallel reviews in this case due to there being no police investigations or Coroners Inquiries in Pakistan or the UK, to date.

8 Equality and Diversity

8.1 The Review Panel has considered all protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 for Aaliyah and Sauron, and has identified the existence of sex and gendered honour-based abuse and issues of race and ethnicity to be relevant to this review. These factors are discussed in greater depth through the

analysis section of this report but are based on the fact the Aaliyah is a female with much evidence to support she was subject to honour-based abuses due to her culture, albeit not recognised whilst she was alive. The panel has also identified that due to her life experiences as explored through the report, vulnerabilities to consider should include issues of trauma, mental health and problematic drug and alcohol use. The impact on Aaliyah in consequence of child protection procedures have also been considered, Aaliyah having had her child placed away from her with wider family.

8.2 Aaliyah was British born, of Pakistani heritage. Aaliyah's brother outlined her back story stating that their mother and father came to the UK before Aaliyah was born, the family having originally come from a small rural village in Kashmir, Pakistan where many family members still live in a united compound. There remains direct contact with Aaliyahs family. Aaliyah, who was westernised, grew up in what her brother describes as a patriarchal household. Her father grew up in a neighbouring village to Aaliyah's mother.

8.3 Sauron was Aaliyahs first cousin, their mothers being sisters. He is the same age as Aaliyah. Whilst in Pakistan, Sauron did not receive an education,[7] and he could not speak or read English throughout the scope of the review. He is reported to have come from a patriarchal culture. Very little is known about Sauron through this review. Agency information records that he had a gambling habit and potentially used the services of escort agencies and that it was an important personal ambition for Sauron to be in the UK for a better life and to provide financial support to relatives in Pakistan.

8.4 Assessing Aaliyah through the lens of Intersectionality presents a complex individual, shaped by the early death of her father very suddenly from a diabetic seizure which caused him to fall and hit his head, killing him, when Aalyiah was with him at 14 years old. This resulted in Aaliyah suffering trauma and depression, and the development of OCD[8] and mood swings. To cope, Aaliyah began experimenting with drugs and consuming alcohol at a point when her elder siblings started to leave home, leaving her more isolated. Her resulting behaviour created family pressure to take her to Pakistan when she was 25 years of age to remove her from her situation for a while. Whilst in Pakistan, an agreed

[7] As disclosed by family

[8] OCD: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder , a condition characterized by repeated unwanted thoughts and repetitive behaviours. OCD - Search

arranged marriage[9] to Sauron took place, and their child was born the following year. Sauron did not come to the UK until 2018.

8.5 This resulted in Aaliyah, a confident and social young woman, marrying a first cousin with limited education whose attitudes reflected traditional family expectations and with whom she could only converse in his language; and having to provide support for him to adapt to living in England and ensure his spousal visa.

9 Dissemination

9.1 Once agreement for the final report has been given by the Home Office Quality Assurance Panel, an Executive Summary of this DARDR report will be available on the Coventry Council website. The report will be suitably anonymised to protect the dignity and privacy of the family and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.

9.2 Upon publication, all partner agencies, locally or nationally, will be made aware, and the action plan will be shared with the agencies involved. In addition, a copy of the final report will be provided to the Office for Police and Crime Commissioner and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

9.3 The review has been assured by Coventry City Council that the learning will be disseminated by means of partnership training and developed guidance.

9.4 Aaliyah's family have been provided the opportunity to review the Overview Report and Action Plan, and comment appropriately.

10 Background Information to Aaliyah's Death

10.1 The brief circumstances are that Aaliyah married Sauron in 2012, in Pakistan, and their child was born in 2013. Sauron did not come to the UK until the Spring of 2018. Prior to this there was only phone contact whilst he remained abroad. Phone contact was necessary to evidence regular contact for a spousal visa application. Aaliyah took the child abroad to meet Sauron on a few occasions prior to the visa being granted. Aaliyah's family report that the relationship seemed strained and seen to deteriorate from the start, being visible to family and friends within a matter of months of Sauron arriving in the UK.

[9] Aaliyahs brother asserts that whilst her siblings were not aware of an impending marriage whilst she was in Pakistan and were strongly against it when they became aware, they believe that Aaliyah made the decision to marry herself.

10.2 Sauron adhered to his cultural upbringing, holding cultural family values[10]. He did not approve of Aaliyahs drinking alcohol or going out with friends and their relationship broke down due to arguments about this and money. Sadly, Aaliyah's dependency on alcohol and substances, together with numerous police call outs for reports of domestic abuse from Sauron's abusive behaviour, resulted in child court proceedings making the decision to remove her child for placement with one of her sisters. Aaliyah's family considered her behaviour to be the cause of her child being placed away from her. Aaliyah and Sauron separated. Sadly, Aaliyah proving unable to fully manage her drug addiction, ensured the court upheld their decision and her child was placed with their maternal Aunt, long term.

10.3 The decision of the court occurred during the covid lock-down during which Aaliyah lived alone. Aaliyah and Sauron remained in contact and in August 2021, Sauron talked her into going to Pakistan, alone, on a one-way ticket paid for by his employer, for a family event. In Pakistan, Aaliyah had a poor relationship with Sauron's family, and she stated her intention to divorce when she returned home.

10.4 Aaliyah had been isolated in Pakistan, having broken her smart phone and living in a remote compound with her and Sauron's wider family. She asked her friend to transfer the funds for a return flight, and her brother believes it was booked on the 10th October; he having later found evidence of the transfer of £800 in funds. Aaliyah texted her sister to arrange collection for her intended date of arrival at the airport in the UK, due to be the 1st of November 2021 to ensure she would make her appointment with Probation. Sadly, on the day Aaliyah sent the text request to her sister, she allegedly fell ill and died very unexpectedly, this being the 10th of October 2021.

10.5 Through the relationship there were several reports of domestic abuse to the police during the scoping period, commencing in October 2018, all of which were reported to Children's Social Care to protect their child. All reports were assessed as both Aaliyah and Sauron being equally to blame for the abuse[11] and on one occasion, both were arrested. There were no prosecutions, and Sauron did not hold a criminal record.

10.6 Aaliyah had received a caution for an offence of theft in 2018 and a few days after her child was placed away from her, she committed an offence of burglary to which she pleaded guilty, and for which she was due to be sentenced in November 2025, after she returned from Pakistan.

[10] Terminology used by Aaliyahs family to describe their perceived families culture whereby the family has a male head of household and in their traditional community, expectations as set by the male head, or other male heads of families, are expected to be followed.
[11] As recorded in Police and Social Care documentation.

11 Chronology of Significant Events

11.1 **18/07/2018:** Aaliyah arrested for theft of a bank card from a medical centre. Aaliyah stated that she was having a hard time, suffered with depression and was the victim of domestic abuse. Completed a victim awareness course and received a caution.

11.2 **19/08/18**: Children's Social Care (CSC), completed a Children & Families Assessment following Aaliyah's child disclosing to a member of nursery staff that Daddy hit mummy.

11.3 **20/08/2018:** Amber MASH referral due to concerns that Aaliyah drank heavily and had tested positive for drug consumption. There were concerns for possible domestic abuse between their child's parents. A strategy discussion in MASH was requested.

11.4 **03.10.2018:** Domestic Abuse Incident. Aaliyah reported to CSC that Sauron had smacked a plate out of her hand and Aaliyah asked him to leave. A child safety plan was agreed with support from trusted family members.

11.5 **04/11/2018:** GP referral for Aaliyahs mental health.

11.6 **10/11/18:** Aaliyah attended the Emergency Department following a fall onto her back resulting in right elbow pain. Accompanied by husband.

11.6 **10/11/18:** Aaliyah called police to report that her mother had taken her child and assaulted her. Filed no further action due to Aaliyah being drunk and not wanting to make a formal statement and one witness stating Aaliyah was aggressive.

11.7 **10/11/18:** CSC record a domestic abuse incident where Aaliyah recorded as having offended against her mother.

11.8 **22/11/18:** Change, Grow, Live (CGL), undertook a personalised assessment. Aaliyah had her arm in a cast due to a fractured elbow allegedly caused by her mother[12].

11.9 **06/12/18 to 14/01/2019**: CSC monitored child's safety plan. Concerns were that both Aaliyah and Sauron minimised the harm to their child by their fighting.

11.10 **24/01/19:** CGL conducted full risk review.

11.11 **25/01/2019:** MASH report from police that Aaliyah had left home after an argument and Sauron walked the streets to find her with their child, cold and wet.

[12] This has not been able to be substantiated.

11.12 **07/02/2019:** A verbal argument and physical altercation took place between Aaliyah and Sauron. It was reported that Aaliyah was intoxicated, and Sauron had hit, kicked and shouted at her.

11.13 **11/02/19:** Aaliyahs social worker recorded a call from maternal aunt to say they were extremely concerned for the child's welfare and that the family were looking at getting mum sectioned under the metal health act as mum's behaviour is irrational. She's currently drinking heavily and has left her child home alone on several occasions.

11.14 **08/03/19:** Aaliyah called 999 to report Sauron had grabbed her by the throat. Aaliyah was hysterical and very, very, angry. An argument occurred after Aaliyah had been out drinking and this was the cause of tension. Aaliyah stated he grabbed her neck and in defence, she grabbed his clothes and ripped his shirt. She wanted him arresting for strangling her. Sauron stated Aaliyah had woken him up and attacked her, ripped his clothes and had scratches to his hands. Sauron arrested, Aaliyah would not press charges. Case filed no further action. DASH assessment – standard risk. Incident referred to MASH.

11.15 **08/03/19:** CSC recorded verbal and physical argument and that both had injuries.

11.16 **08/03/19:** School recorded events as related by both parties. Bruise noted to Aaliyah's face, and scratches to Sauron. Both relay the argument started through Aaliyah asking for money for food. She stated she hadn't eaten over the weekend due to no food in the house.

11.17 **11/03/19:** CSC recorded strategy discussion. There were concerns that Aaliyah used alcohol and cannabis to manage her low mood and had stated that she no longer wished to live. She had also started using cocaine. Both Aaliyah and Sauron listed as suspects. It was noted that Sauron had a close relationship with Aaliyah's family and would request help from them as part of a safety agreement if Aaliyah was intoxicated. Their child expressed to social workers that Sauron scared him and would request to go to Grandparents when mum was not there.

11.18 **12/03/19:** GP visit and following Aaliyah's disclosure of strangulation and bruise noted, GP referred to Coventry Haven, Women's aid.

11.19 **12/03/2019:** Coventry Haven Women's Aid received a referral from GP to IRIS[13], stating that Aaliyah had been physically assaulted and strangled on 08/03/2019 and feeling suicidal. DASH completed.

[13] IRIS: Identification & Referral to Improve Safety), is a specialist domestic abuse education, support and referral programme providing training for GP teams and a named advocate to whom patients can be

11.20 **14/03/19:** Strategy meeting. Aaliyah admitted alcohol and cannabis addiction due to depression. Sauron claimed Aaliyah had been abusive towards him physically and emotionally which included threatening to send him back to Pakistan and have him killed there. These allegations were denied by Aaliyah, who stated he was physically abusive towards her, and he only spent time with her when he wanted to have sex with her. The maternal family had been a supportive network to them all. They had raised concerns about Aaliyah's drinking, drug taking and mental health, but they appear to be controlling and undermining of Aaliyah's attempts to parent her child. **1st April**, Aaliyah's child placed on child protection plan.

11.21 **28/04/19:** Aaliyah called the police and reported Sauron had hit her, smacking her head against a wardrobe after she refused to have sex and stated he would cause trouble for her with CSC. Counter allegation made and Sauron seen with scratches to face. Aaliyah was intoxicated and had no visible injuries. Both were arrested. In interview, Aaliyah outlined difficulties for her in the marriage. Sauron chose to make no comment. Case filed no further action.

11.22 **30/04/19:** At Coventry Haven Aaliyah met IRIS practitioner and outlined issues within her marriage.

11.23 **08/05/19:** CSC recorded a domestic abuse incident reported by the family who state Aaliyah was under the influence of alcohol.

11.24 **22/05/19:** Coventry Haven met with Aaliyah who expressed a wish to move to a different property but needed financial help to do so. Aaliyah advised that she then moved on the **19th of June 2019.** Aaliyah remained at this address until her death.

11.25 **23/07/19:** Change, Grow, Live closed Aaliyah's case as a serial non-attender.

11.26 **29/08/19:** CSC referred Aaliyah to Coventry Haven.

11.27 **12/09/19:** CSC recorded Aaliyah self-medicating with alcohol and suicidal 28. Mental health assessment sought.

11.28 **12/09/19:** School recorded Sauron stating Aaliyah had kicked him out when he wouldn't give her enough money. States its Aaliyahs flat and she shouts at him and kicks the doors. Advised to report to police if it recurs.

11.29 **13/09/19:** Aaliyah attended A and E reporting feeling suicidal. Referral to GP.

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referred to for support. IRIS offers a targeted intervention for patients experiencing current or former domestic violence or abuse from a partner, ex-partner or family member. IRIS supports patients by providing: clear care pathways: emotional support: information on housing or legal remedies; signposting: risk assessments and safety planning.

11.30 **13/09/19:** GP referred to Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team (CRHTT), due to Aaliyah stating she did not want to live. CRHTT unable to establish contact.

11.31 **16/09/19:** CSC visited Aaliyah who agreed to her child staying with Aunt whilst she focused on her needs.

11.32 **16/09/19:** Change, Grow, Live confirm positive drugs test for cocaine. Aaliyah erratic and unsettled. Stated Sauron had left and taking substances because her child is with their Aunt. Disclosed an incident of domestic abuse by Sauron.

11.33 **17/09/19:** CRHTT[14] assessed Aaliyah by phone. Stated depressed and separated from husband.

11.34 **22/09/19:** CRHTT completed an assessment and concluded no on-going role for them. Aaliyah separated from Sauron. Reported having some suicidal thoughts however 'these appear reactional to stressors and past trauma' including domestic abuse.

11.35 **06/10/19:** Aaliyah called 999 to report to police that Sauron 'had kicked the f out of her'. Aaliyah informed officers that she had a physical altercation with Sauron, who banged her head, after discovering that he had been using the services of escorts around the country. She stated that there was previously undisclosed DA, which he had also perpetrated. DARA[15] risk assessment: medium risk. Sauron arrested and denied assault countering he had been assaulted and had scratches. Aaliyah no injuries, insufficient evidence and case closed. Agreed to a referral to the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV[16]) but it cannot be established if this happened.

11.36 **06/10/19:** CSC recorded a domestic abuse incident. Following Aaliyah finding searches for escorts, this turned into a physical altercation.

11.37: **15/10/19:** Change, Grow, Live saw Aaliyah who reported alcohol dependency.

11.38 **05/11/19:** CSC made the decision to commence pre-proceedings due to Aaliyah's child suffering emotional abuse. Aaliyah had not been undergoing drugs testing.

11.39 **04/12/19:** CSC referred both Aaliyah and Sauron to perpetrator of domestic abuse services.

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[14] CRHTT: Community Mental Health Services. Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team

[15] DARA: Domestic Abuse Risk assessment introduced by the College of Policing for police use only, designed to better identify coercive and controlling behaviour: Police Professional | Officers better equipped to spot controlling behaviour

[16] NCVD: https://www.ncdv.org.uk/ provides a fast, free, emergency injunction service for domestic abuse.

11.40 **23/01/20:** Aaliyah saw her GP and reported low mood.

11.41 **31/01/20:** Change, Grow, Live saw Aaliyah and prescribed alcohol relapse medication which Aaliyah did not collect.

11.42 **31/01/20:** Psychological Assessment of Aaliyah was completed. The report highlighted numerous concerns about Aaliyah's readiness to change and her reliance on substances to cope with situations, her patterns of chronic domestic abuse, her mental health difficulties and narcissistic tendencies.

11.43 **26/02/20:** Sauron attended perpetrator work and denied offending stating it was all Aaliyah.

11.44 **13/03/20:** Aaliyah self-referred to Talking Therapies but did not respond to contact.

11.45 **31/03/20:** Aaliyah prescribed anti-craving medication from Change, Grow, Live, but did not collect.

11.46 **07/04/20:** CSC commenced care proceedings. Aaliyahs child with maternal Aunt whilst she had tonsilitis, since 02/04/20.

11.47 **15/04/2020:** Children's Social Care recorded that Family Drugs and Alcohol Court (FDAC), recommended that Aaliyah receives 20 sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, (CBT), prior to starting treatment for alcohol use. Due to non-engagement, case closed on the **1st May 2020.**

11.48 **21/05/20**: The police recorded that Aaliyah, whilst drunk, got into an altercation with a female. Referred to CSC and assessed at child protection review.

11.49 **27/05/20:** Aaliyah self-referred to Talking Therapies. She missed an appointment and rebooked for later in June. Telephone assessment on the **17th of June 2020** during which Aaliyah expressed a wish to stop drinking and receive counselling. Talking Therapies not suitable so referred to Valley House[17], but no appointments available due to covid restrictions.

11.50 **27/07/20 to 11/08/20:** Change, Grow, Live resumed work with Aaliyah for problematic alcohol use. Aaliyah assessed as a medium dependency. Admitted smoking cannabis daily and agreed to counselling, which commenced with Talking Therapies. Aaliyah reports her child living with Aunt.

11.51 **01/10/20:** Interim Care Order granted to maternal Aunt. Aaliyah tells school she is very sad about this.

[17] Valley House supports domestic abuse victims to live somewhere safe and at the time were commissioned to provide counselling services. This service is now provided by 'space to thrive'.

11.52 **05/10/20:** Aaliyah reported drinking a bottle of wine a day to Change, Grow, Live.

11.53 **20/10/20:** The police record Aaliyah committed an offence of burglary to steal and use bank cards. Reported to CSC.

11.54 **21/10/20:** Talking Therapies assess that Aaliyah not committed to therapy currently and even though she wanted to engage, she will be closed to them until she is able to commit. GP informed.

11.55 **October 2020:** Family Drugs and Alcohol Court (FDAC), service engaged with Aaliyah in support of addressing substance issues to be able to parent her child. Aaliyah disclosed cocaine use and that alcohol and cannabis increased at situation with her child. Agreed to full assessment.

11.56 **02/11/20:** Aaliyah suffered a mental health crisis and reported to Ambulance Service, feeling suicidal but refused treatment from ambulance team.

11.57 **December 2020 to 17th February 2021:** Change, Grow, Live worked with Aaliyah who was able to commence anti-craving medication. By February 27th Aaliyah reported not having drunk for a month and no drugs use.

11.58 **26th of February, 25th of March and 22nd of April 2021:** Aaliyah told her GP that in February, she had a panic attack due to stress re family. In March, that she cannot sleep but on the whole mood has improved, and in April, feels medication not working and feeling low.

11.59 **15/05/21:** Special Guardianship Order made for Aaliyah's child to remain with Aunt. Reduced access rights for Aaliyah. Change, Grow Live report Aaliyah stating alcohol free for six months and having reached goals, case closed.

11.60 **19/05/21:** Aaliyah self-referred to Talking Therapies.

11.61 **22/05/21:** Aaliyah had a mental health crisis and asked to be sectioned. States did not wish to live and had consumed vodka. Attended A and E but did not stay for treatment.

11.62 **28/05/21:** Aaliyah told her GP that very low but not suicidal.

11.63 **01/08/21:** Aaliyah attended court and pleaded guilty to burglary. Sentence due in November.

11.64 **26th and 27th August 2021:** Aaliyah informed her GP that feeling anxious and about to travel to Pakistan.

11.65 **15/10/21:** Aaliyah's brother informed agencies that Aaliyah had died in Pakistan.

12 Overview of Known Information

12.1 Throughout the scoping period, Aaliyah reported being the victim of physical and emotional domestic abuse to the police, Children's Social care, her GP, Change, Grow, Live, Talking Therapies, FDAC, and her child's school. Aaliyah described her circumstances of abuse to include controlling behaviour.

12.2 Agencies were aware that Aaliyah was British born and had agreed to a marriage to Sauron, her first cousin, a Pakistani man from a remote area who spoke no English. Aaliyah described her difficult marital and family situation and the pressures this caused her, indicating a potential risk from honour-based abuse that was not recognised.

12.3 Aaliyah reported substance use and a dependency on alcohol. Due to intoxication and counter-allegations by Sauron, Aaliyah was assessed to be a perpetrator of abuse or equally to blame for the abusive relationship. Aaliyah was known to take steps to separate from Sauron.

12.4 Aaliyahs and Sauron's poor relationship impacted on their child, resulting in a placement with his maternal Aunt. Aaliyah responded to treatment for alcohol dependency, abstaining for six months, but did not stop substance use, and the child proceedings court made the decision to place her child permanently away from her on a Special Guardianship Order, with reduced access, three months prior to travelling.

12.5 Immediately following the Special Guardianship Order, Aaliyah had a reported mental health crisis and reported having resumed drinking.

12.6 Aaliyahs GP were aware that Aaliyah was travelling to Pakistan.

13 Analysis

13.1 Aaliyah's Lived Experience[18]

13.1.1 Aaliyah grew up in Coventry, the youngest in a large family of 3 brothers and 3 sisters. She was particularly close to her youngest sister and youngest brother with whom she spent her time with, growing up. Her parents were both born in a small rural village in Kashmir, Pakistan. Her parents came to the UK before Aaliyah was born. Although her parents were a traditional Pakistani family, Aaliyah was westernised and outgoing and described as very funny. Her father had had an issue with alcohol use, and this had impacted on the family, especially her mother.

[18] Much information was provided by Aaliyah's brother in writing and whilst present at panel meetings.

13.1.2 When Aaliyah was 14 years old, she was with her father when he collapsed from a diabetic hyperglycaemic episode, causing him to hit his head on the floor, resulting in his sudden death. The trauma of this event, and sudden loss of her father, never left Aaliyah. It manifested in rebellious behaviour and experimentation with alcohol and cannabis, and then cocaine.

13.1.3 Aaliyah continued to use substances whilst feeling isolated due to her siblings starting to leave home, including her youngest brother, who had become her role model after losing her Dad. Aaliyah was affected by his loss in particular because he had committed a serious crime and was sent to prison for 12 years, leaving Aaliyah alone and further traumatised at this occurrence.

13.1.4 In 2012 when Aaliyah was 25 years old, her mother took her to Pakistan to stay with her sister, Aaliyah's aunt. Whilst there, Aaliyahs family state that she agreed to an arranged marriage with her first cousin, Sauron. The review panel, including Aaliyah's brother, discussed this and it is not known why she specifically agreed, and the review panel can only surmise that family tradition and wanting to see Aaliyah settle down into a traditional family way of life, was an influence both for her family and herself. She may have been under pressure to accept, such pressure being described as immense by her brother, and there could have been issues of shame surrounding her use of substances and her brother being in prison. Aaliyah's mother was with her in Pakistan and would have been under a great deal of direct cultural pressure to support her nephew to build a better life in the UK, an ambition that was also important to Sauron, himself. It is believed that Sauron was aware of Aaliyahs personality but his ambition to go to the UK to earn money would have been more important to him. Aaliyahs mother, however, may have hoped that marriage would settle Aaliyah down. Ultimately, it cannot be established why she agreed but the family state that this was not a forced marriage.

13.1.5 Aaliyah did agree to the marriage, although her siblings, when they were told, did not. Her brother explained that whilst at the village, Aaliyah would have been the centre of attention, the fact that she was British would have been of great interest to her family. Potentially, Aaliyah did not grasp what such a marriage may actually mean for her in reality. The result is that her marriage contained Aaliyah within both her own Mothers traditions and values, and her husbands, who also had the same traditional family values. Aaliyah became married to a first cousin who spoke no English, who had not received a formal education, and who was expected to be the head of the household. Aaliyah was educated and used to western freedoms. Once married, this must have created a degree of conflict within herself from her own westernised freedoms against the traditions of her husband and family from the start of her marriage. A difficult situation

amalgamating two cultures and balancing acceptance and making her family happy, versus her own values and needs, whilst also managing an underlying existing trauma.

13.1.6 Indeed, Aaliyahs family report that when she returned from Pakistan, married and pregnant, Sauron remained in Pakistan waiting for her to arrange his spousal visa. At this point, Aaliyah did express having second thoughts. However, her mother told her she needed to have a man and persuaded her to continue with the arrangements, which she did. Her brother stated that family honour was a factor at this point.

13.1.7 Their child had been born in 2013, and they lived with Aaliyah's mother, in a home where English was not spoken. Once Sauron's spousal visa was granted, he joined Aaliyah in Coventry in the spring of 2018. Aaliyah's mother got on well with Sauron, sharing family values, and Aaliyah felt isolated. She had to sort everything for him due to the fact Sauron could not speak or read English. Aaliyah returned to work but stopped after Sauron wanted her to remain home with their child, further isolating her within the home.

13.1.8 Aaliyah now found herself in a restrictive marriage. Her husband did not drink and followed his cultural beliefs from his upbringing. He reinforced his beliefs through only socialising with other Pakistani men and due to living in a predominantly Pakistani community was able to remain tightly within his culture. Aaliyah was outside of how a perfect wife is perceived to be in her family's culture[19]. She liked to socialise, she drank, and was very well known in her local community, especially among those who shared her use of substances. Her socialising and drinking caused arguments between her and Sauron and her first report of being subject to domestic abuse was Sauron smashing a plate out of her hand after he became angry at their child's behaviour, in October 2018. However, given the nature of their marriage, it is highly likely that Aaliyah suffered on-going controlling domestic abuse prior to that, as seen by giving up her job, ensuring Sauron controlled the money, wanting to restrict her social life and set the rules of parenting. As such, the marriage broke down very quickly from Sauron's arrival in the spring. This must have been hard for Aaliyah who had been bringing up her son since 2013. There had been no interactions with agencies prior to the first interaction with the police.

13.1.9 Aaliyah first mentioned being a victim of domestic abuse to the police after she was arrested for stealing a debit card with which she bought alcohol. Aaliyah showed remorse and said that it had been a cry for help due to suffering depression and being the victim of abuse. Unfortunately, this was not believed

[19] Discussion by the panel and specialist advisors and Aaliyah's brother

by the police who labelled it a calculated theft and did not ask any more about her cry for help or offer any support. This left Aaliyah to continue with Sauron in a challenging situation, made worse by her arrest for a criminal offence.

13.1.10 Children's Social Care became involved with Aaliyah in August 2018 when her child reported that Sauron had hit Aaliyah. This did not lead to support for Aaliyah but instead was assessed as a risky situation for their child through witnessing domestic abuse. It instead highlighted Aaliyahs drinking and possible substance use as being a risk factor for parenting. A report of abuse against Aaliyah was not assessed as necessary by the police and a child in need assessment commenced with no support needs identified for Aaliyah, leaving her in an abusive relationship whilst now also being scrutinised as a parent, which is likely to have felt confusing to Aaliyah.

13.1.11 It is clear that child services were focused on Aaliyah's child, quite properly, and in hindsight, Aaliyah's brother believes that without social care intervention, their child may not have been able to stay within the family. However, Aaliyah's needs were lost within child protection. It is apparent that childrens social care had formed an opinion of Aaliyah with which they attempted to influence the school, where they record a social worker telling her child's school[20] 'be *mindful of Mum as she is prone to exaggerating and not telling the whole picture'*. The school record that in fact, her child had settled well and that mum was engaging well with staff. For Aaliyah, she is working to parent well but is clearly seen as unreliable by a key agency with no efforts made to understand her real life experience and understand what may be going on in her world that could impact on her child. This is an early failing to identify Aaliyah's situation but worse, shows a bias towards Aaliyah which could affect future interactions and decision making by Children's Social Care.

13.1.12 The lack of support continues after Aaliyah told Children's Social Care about the incident with the plate in October after which she asked Sauron to leave the house. Again, there is no support offered to Aaliyah and instead a safety plan agreed that she should leave with her child if an argument broke out, as should Sauron also leave with their child if an argument broke out. The focus is clearly on abuse between Aaliyah and Sauron and its impact on their child, with Aaliyah's allegation trivialised, or not believed. This must have impacted Aaliyah; she reported abuse but again her parenting is under the microscope with no support or risk identified for Aaliyah in her situation. There is no cultural consideration of her situation evident and no help to change what is happening

[20] As recorded in school notes and provided to the review

and which is impacting her parenting. There is no recognition that there were no reported issues until Sauron arrived from Pakistan.

13.1.13 In November 2018, Aaliyah reported having been assaulted by her mother to the police. When the police attended, Aaliyah was recorded as being drunk and had her child with her in the early hours. The alleged assault had happened at her mother's house, where her child had been when she went out drinking. When she collected him, she states her mother assaulted her. However, Aaliyahs family told the police that Aaliyahs drinking was getting worse and due to intoxication, the police removed Aaliyah to prevent a breach of the peace and left her child with her mother and husband. Aaliyah would not make a complaint, and the matter was filed due to Aaliyah 'having been drunk with no independent witnesses'. The focus was on a criminal justice outcome rather than an identification of Aaliyah's needs. Her report is dismissed but the fact she reported an incident ensures her child is not now with her. In fact, Aaliyah did receive an injury and attended hospital for an injury to her elbow but the circumstances of why or how she was injured has not been established by agencies.

13.1.14 For Aaliyah, the situation with Children's Social Care becomes more difficult when the incident is reported to them as Aaliyah being the offender against her mother and concerns recorded of drinking whilst her child is in her care. This compounds her perceived poor parenting, on the word of her family whose cultural expectations are different to her own, but which professionals do not examine. Sauron was lauded as complying with the safety plan when it became apparent that the reason Aaliyah went to her mother's to collect her child was due to Aaliyah having received a call from a women claiming Sauron was having an affair, which started an argument after which Sauron left to go to her mother's because their child was there. Whilst her child is properly a focus of concern, Aaliyah is lost in the process with no consideration of her reality and understanding of the control being exerted by her family with whom Sauron can turn to against her, or identification of support needs that may help her to better parent. Such a difficult situation for Aaliyah that isn't going to help her manage her current circumstances without turning to substances, but which, if she does, will impact on her ability to parent.

13.1.15 Aaliyah did try to manage her substance use at this point and self-referred for support for this and her mental health; and reported feeling suicidal but with no intention to carry it out because of her child. Her child was placed with her mother and sister for the first time, to give her time to seek support, although Aaliyah quickly rescinded this, wanting him home with her.

13.1.16 At the end of January 2019, Children's Social Care received a report that Sauron had turned up at Aaliyahs mothers, cold and wet at 3.30 in the morning, this being caused by Aaliyah leaving and he stated he had to look for her. A child protection review recorded that the situation had deteriorated with their child telling school that Daddy said Mummy had gone. When spoken to, Aaliyah stated that she and Sauron argued so she left and stayed at a hotel overnight, (in accordance with the safety plan). The reported situation was out of Aaliyahs control. She had left an argumentative situation appropriately and the focus was on Sauron's perspective. There was a clear impact on their child which prompted formal consideration as to whether their child should now be with wider family, but Aaliyah was again lost in this. Her choice to leave to prevent escalation resulted in potentially losing her child to wider family members, with no understanding of her position or support offered to help her parent. Aaliyah must be feeling very angry and disorientated at this.

13.1.17 Aaliyah's and Sauron's relationship did not improve, and the police reported a physical and verbal altercation taking place in February 2019 after which Aaliyah called the police but hung up. They returned the call and reported Aaliyah to be drunk and established that Sauron had hit and kicked her and she had kicked him out. Aaliyah's sister wanted her child to stay with her, which Aaliyah refused but her sister checked on him and he was asleep. Following this, childcare arrangements were progressed for Aaliyah's child to stay some of the time at her mothers and sisters and after her sister reported that the family were considering getting Aaliyah sectioned due to being irrational and drinking, formal child protection processes were explored. Aaliyah had lost her voice at this point. A report of domestic abuse is not explored, with the school noting social care comments that '*it is hard to ascertain who is telling the truth*'. Aaliyah needed some support but didn't get any from her family, husband or agencies. Sauron is living away now and reported that Aaliyah had no money to buy food for her child, reinforcing her apparent lack of parenting skills. From Aaliyah's perspective, she had given up work as requested and might reasonably expect to be provided for in a patriarchal marriage.

13.1.18 In March 2019, Aaliyah called the police to report Sauron had grabbed her by the throat following an argument about her going out with friends and drinking (her child was with her mother). Aaliyah requested money for food, there being none in the house, and they argued during which Sauron tried to strangle her (bruise recorded under chin). Sauron made a counter allegation that Aaliyah had assaulted him, and he had scratches to his hands. The police informed Children's Social Care that both had injuries, and they recorded it as both involved. Sauron told Children's Social Care that he was worried that Aaliyah may have him deported, for which they advised him how to obtain legal help, and

Aaliyah told them that she hadn't eaten for three days as there was no food in the house. Sauron agreed he would make sure there was food available as he had only been buying it if their child was with them. This indicates control being exerted over Aaliyah through money and provision of food. However, although not present during the argument, this situation will impact their child, and the focus was on the impact of their parenting. The existence of controlling behaviour by Sauron was not considered or identified, nor was Aaliyah's situation viewed through the lens of cultural competence to understand her situation within the marriage and why she had no money. Aaliyah would not support an investigation against Sauron, and the case was closed with no consideration of the overall picture for Aaliyah and any risks she may be exposed to through domestic abuse.

13.1.19 As before, Aaliyah seeking help from the police ensured further focus on her ability to parent and did not help her personally. The resulting child conference focused on her use of alcohol and cannabis and her expressed desire to no longer live. It was recorded that her alcohol use was often the trigger to domestic incidents, which is very blaming to Aaliyah without an appreciation of her cultural difficulties or existing trauma. Sauron had a voice and was credited with being very supportive of their child and had a close relationship with Aaliyahs family and could request help from them when Aaliyah was intoxicated. However, it was also commented on that their child reported to social workers being scared of Sauron but there is no examination of that or consideration that he could, in fact, be abusive to Aaliyah, as their child previously reported, or consider that there were no reported issues until he joined the family. Again, Aaliyah's needs are silent in the child protection process which must have been so frustrating for her and impacted on her well-being, which would further impact on her vulnerabilities and ability to parent.

13.1.20 Aaliyah was struggling mentally at this point, and her GP referred her to specialist domestic abuse support on seeing the bruise to her chin and Aaliyah reporting having been strangled. Aaliyah said she was feeling suicidal and was dissatisfied with the support from mental health, Social Services, and Domestic Abuse agencies, although she was hesitant to share her concerns about domestic abuse and social care involvement. Given that every time she did it ensured her less control over her child, it is maybe not surprising.

13.1.21 A strategy meeting followed during which Aaliyah disclosed that she smoked cannabis when her child was not home and had an alcohol dependency stemming from depression. She stated that Sauron was physically abusive and was only home when he wanted sex. Sauron refuted this and said that Aaliyah was abusive and threatens to send him home to Pakistan. Aaliyah's brother advises that to return to Pakistan would bring shame on Sauron and he would try

to prevent this due to the impact this would have upon the visa requirements and that he did not want to return to Pakistan due to the financial dependency that other family members there had upon him. The child protection focus was on their child who was unhappy and suffering emotional abuse as a result of the parent's relationship, a necessary focus, but Aaliyahs needs were again not considered, reinforced by her family reporting her for drinking, taking substances and mental health. There was no direct support for Aaliyah or examination of family dynamics even though it was noted that '*they appear to be controlling and undermining of Aaliyah's attempts to parent her child'*. Aaliyah is likely to have felt very alone and unhappy and possibly that her options were dominated by those closest to her whom she may have felt did not appear to have her best interests at heart. However, her family share that they were considering her and her child's best interests even if it might have not been recognised by Aaliyah at the time. Aaliyah is likely to have felt very alone and unhappy and with her options dominated by those closest to her, albeit with the welfare of her child at the heart of their concerns. Aaliyah's brother has explained that the family wanted the best for Aaliyah at the same time as protecting her child and it was a difficult situation for them. Again though, there is no consideration within the child protection meeting of Aaliyahs position within her family and culture and how this may impact her isolation, vulnerabilities and ultimately how this impacts Aaliyah's child. The review has not been able to establish the child protection perspective on this or establish how procedures may have changed since 2019 to better support families within child protection proceedings.

13.1.22 Aaliyah called the police a further time at the end of April 2019, reporting that Sauron had assaulted her and hit her head against the wardrobe. Aaliyah had no visible injuries and Sauron stated that Aaliyah had assaulted him and he had scratches to his face and so both were arrested on face value for further investigation. This could not be what Aaliyah expected when she called for help. In custody, it is recorded that she smelt of alcohol, and she admitted having taken cannabis. Aaliyah explained to the police about her arranged marriage, that they were totally unsuited through culture, and that her relationship made her feel suicidal. She outlined very clear indicators of a coercive and controlling relationship within a cultural patriarchal relationship. She told them that she had refused to have sex with Sauron, and he threatened to report her to social care and pushed her against the wardrobe by her neck. Aaliyah was open to being referred for services and obtaining civil orders to prevent Sauron taking their child abroad, which was positive for her, and she stated her intention to divorce. Sauron declined to comment, (via an interpreter), and both were released from custody as there was no evidence to support either account over the other. So, yet again, after asking for help for a domestic assault, Aaliyah is

not supported and her word not taken over Sauron's. She is recorded as a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

13.1.23 This impacted on child protection processes because again it is recorded that both are responsible for abuse in the relationship and that their child does not have a stable base. Whilst that is true in consequence, it is clear that every incident reported had been when their child was with Aaliyah's mother which supports Aaliyah stating that she does not go out drinking or take substances when she is with her child. It is the subsequent abusive incidents that cause the issues.

13.1.24 Aaliyah had expressed a wish to get divorced, and she commenced work with Women's Aid where she relayed a pattern of abusive incidents by Sauron and agreed to counselling to help her to parent her child. She was offered help by agencies to secure funding to move to her own place which she did, positively for Aaliyah.

13.1.25 Over the summer, there were no formal reports of abuse although Sauron was staying with Aaliyah. Aliyah conceded her need for alcohol to Children's Social Care and her child remained on the child protection register. Aaliyah tested positive for cannabis and cocaine in September and was low, self-medicating with alcohol. She had a mental health crisis, for which she was supported by the crisis team, so was clearly not in a good place living with Sauron. Shortly afterwards, Sauron told social care that Aaliyah had kicked him out and that he doesn't feel safe with her for which he was advised to call the police if necessary, supporting him as a victim against Aaliyah and enforcing the perceived view of her as equally to blame for the abusive relationship. The focus for her child's school and social care, was the fact that Aaliyah had tested positive for cocaine and the risks this posed to her child.

13.1.26 Aaliyah reported to the crisis team, that September is the anniversary of her father's death and this affects her. She expressed her unhappiness in her marriage and reported that Sauron had now left.

13.1.27 In October 2019, Aaliyah made a final report to the police that she had had a physical altercation with Sauron after discovering that he had been using the services of escorts around the country. She stated that there was previously undisclosed domestic abuse for which Sauron was also the perpetrator. She continued that she had been attempting to delete intimate images of herself from his phone when he grabbed her hair at the back of her head and tried to get the phone from her.

13.1.28 Sauron was arrested and denied assaulting Aaliyah telling the police that she had mental health problems and was lying. He had scratches to his face and

Aaliyah had none. Due to no witnesses, and Aaliyah not accounting for any injuries to Sauron in her statement, it was considered that there was no realistic chance of a successful prosecution. The police informed Children's Social Care, who recorded a physical altercation between them. They had already decided to progress to legal proceedings due to domestic violence on both sides, so this must have been hard for Aaliyah that another request for help had reinforced the potential loss of her child.

13.1.29 Aaliyah now reported binge drinking to her substance support team and asked for help. She was arguing with her family and told her child's social care worker about this and had an argument with family on the phone in front of the social worker, which sadly reinforced the unstable position for her child, and a decision was made to commence legal proceedings. As part of this, Aaliyah underwent a psychological assessment the following January which highlighted concerns about her readiness to change, her reliance on substances, her mental health and her chronic domestic abuse. Sauron was assessed as a domestic abuser, but he denied all allegations, placing the blame on Aaliyah and so could not undergo any planned work.

13.1.30 This was a difficult time for Aaliyah, and she self-referred to mental health services, although she didn't subsequently engage with them. It was then the start of covid and initially, she lived alone with her child and reported to school, virtually, that all was well and her child happy. She was prescribed anti-addiction medication but due to being on antibiotics for tonsilitis did not collect her prescription. Whilst then ill, her child went to stay with her sister and shortly after this, Children's Social Care commenced legal proceedings and in fact, her child did not return to Aaliyah after this. She had been happy, then when ill had sought the help of her sister and in consequence, was not then able to look after her child again. Aaliyah was now alone through covid, a situation likely to enhance her isolation and vulnerability.

13.1.31 In May 2020, a parenting assessment for Aaliyah concluded that there were concerns that had not been addressed in respect of substance misuse, domestic abuse and poor mental health and that Aaliyah did not meet her child's emotional needs and had a chaotic lifestyle with no stability or structure to their life. It was recommended that alternative carers be found whilst Aaliyah took steps to get help. This situation was not helped when the police informed social care that Aaliyah had been in an argument with her neighbour. Sauron also reported that Aaliyah had been drinking and was abusive if he didn't deliver money each week. The difficulty for Aaliyah here is that she is in a cultural marriage in which she is very unhappy, and which impacts on her need for substances. She has clearly tried to allow Sauron in her life despite this and

having no job due to him making her give it up, still relies on him for money alongside her benefits. Sauron resents her needing money and is advised by the social worker to report Aaliyah to the police if she is abusive, indicating no cultural competence as to her situation, and again a bias against Aaliyah.

13.1.32 In June 2020, Aaliyah engaged with mental health and stated that she wants to get back on track for her and her child, and that lockdown had made her realise that she had issues that she needed to address. Her attendance at mental health sessions were monitored by social care and Aaliyah attended one session later in the year before agreeing to be discharged, not having taken up any further offered appointments. In July, Aaliyah reengaged with substance support, identifying that she wanted to explore and process some underlying feelings of loss and loneliness and also some feelings about self. She stated that she wanted to be able to move forward with life and be there for her six-year-old child.

13.1.33 In October 2020, an interim care order was made for her child to live with her sister. Following this, Aaliyah reported heavy drinking and cannabis use. She told her child's school that she was very sad about only being allowed limited supervised access. In October, Aaliyah committed an offence of burglary and social care were quickly informed she had committed a dishonesty offence. Aaliyahs situation at this point was very hard for her and she didn't take calls from the mental health team who told her they would not be working with her because of this until she could commit. This is a viscous circle for Aaliyah who needed support for her mental health to stop using substances, the consequences of which reduced her ability to be seen as a good parent, and reduced her contact, and so she turned back to substances.

13.1.34 Later in October, Aaliyah reported being rock bottom and she had a mental health episode in early November, for which her child's social worker called an ambulance due to her feeling suicidal. Aaliyah denied this on their arrival. It is apparent that Aaliyahs relationship with social care was very poor as demonstrated by comments school recorded when asking for advice for the occasions Aaliyah spoke to school and was told: *'Any Communication regarding what is going on at school needs to go through Auntie first and I think if you or the school engage with mum she will never be off the phone. The Local Authority have 51% Parental Responsibility therefore I suggest you go through the Looked After team. As I am no longer (the child's) social worker I can't comment however I would have as little contact with mum as you can.'*

13.1.35This highlights how biased Children's Social Care were towards Aaliyah. Her needs, on this occasion to be able to speak to school about her child who is no longer living with her, are irrelevant to social care. She was perceived as a

problem as well as an instigator of domestic abuse. There was no compassion for her nor attempts made to work with her to help her be a better parent. Worryingly, it was the same social worker who tried to influence her child's school against her who then undertook assessments of Aaliyah. Instead, they listened to Sauron and took no cognisance of Aaliyahs cultural lived experience, failing to identify existing trauma and understanding why Aaliyah had depression and relied on substances. Aaliyah must have been so frustrated and feeling alone, watching her child slip away from her. The poor relationship with social care was seen by a Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC), worker who recorded concerns about the way they spoke to Aaliyah in a meeting (on-line) and had to intervene. Change, Grow, Live have recorded that Aaliyah was exasperated that no one was listening to her. This is a very poor example of how to engage with those who most need the help to better parent their child and the relationship with Children's Social Care failed Aaliyah. Both FDAC and Change, Grow, Live escalated their concerns about the impact Aaliyahs child's social worker was having on Aaliyah; Change, Grow, Live escalating to FDAC, then FDAC making a formal complaint to Children's Social Care. The review has not been able to establish the outcome of the escalation.

13.1.36 Aaliyah agreed to fully work with FDAC, and there was a change of social worker. From December 2020, Aaliyah took steps to reduce her drinking and was able to commence anti-craving medication. By February, Aaliyah had been alcohol free for a month, and this continued for a six-month period. However, Aaliyah did fail a test for cocaine during this period. She was no longer living with Sauron and there were no further reports of domestic incidents post October 2019 or indeed any reports from the police involving Aaliyah, after a reported argument with a neighbour in February 2021.

13.1.37 Despite Aaliyahs situation settling and a new social worker in place, her sister sought a Special Guardianship Order which was supported by agencies and on the 18th of May 2021, the child proceedings court made the decision to grant it. This resulted in reduced contact for Aaliyahs to once a fortnight, supervised. It was an interim decision to provide an opportunity for Aaliyah to demonstrate being able to create a safe place for her child, although the review has no insight into how this was perceived by Aaliyah.

13.1.38 The initial effect on Aaliyah was immediate and the following day, Aaliyah self-referred to mental health services. On the 22nd of May, she reported feeling suicidal to the ambulance service and asked to be sectioned having consumed alcohol again. Her reason for trying so hard had come to nothing at this point for her, with the court order reducing her contact despite the fact she had been alcohol free.

13.1.39 For reasons unknown, Aaliyah agreed to travel alone to Pakistan to attend a reported family event in August, arranged by Sauron, on a one-way ticket paid for by Sauron's employer. At this time, Aaliyah was separated from Sauron, she was due to attend court for an offence of burglary, had resumed drinking, had mental health struggles and was no longer able to care for her son due to the court order preventing both Aaliyah and Sauron from parenting their child. Sauron blamed Aaliyah for this, taking no responsibility for their poor marriage and his role as to why neither could now parent. Culturally, any one of these factors would have affected the families perceived honour within the family and given the close links between Aaliyahs and Sauron's family, the review panel agree that the wider family in Pakistan would have known every detail of her position, with Aaliyah's mother likely under pressure to 'manage her'. Aaliyah took out a life insurance policy with no named beneficiary before she travelled, which her brother believes was to ensure if she didn't return, the insurance company would need to investigate before paying out. Aaliyah was fully aware of her need to attend court and ensured a friend sent her money for a return ticket home. However, she died unexpectedly on the day she told her family she had arranged her return, and this review is not able to establish why. These events are discussed later in this report.

13.1.40 No agency had an overview of the cultural situation for Aaliyah or the existence of trauma through a lack of professional curiosity to get beneath Aaliyahs presenting behaviours and understand why she relied on substances, and understand the pressure she was under, culturally. Professional curiosity is a key element in safeguarding and essential to understanding vulnerabilities.

13.1.41 Professional curiosity is accomplished by using an array of skills which include the ability to observe, listen, ask direct questions, and contemplate and verify information. It requires a professional to:

- not accept information at face value
- not make assumptions
- triangulate information from different sources (including looking at past information/case notes) – in order to gain better understanding
- be conscious of unconscious bias, and
- be respectfully nosey.

13.1.42 Professional curiosity is a concept which has been recognised as important within the area of safeguarding for many years and is a well-known theme identified in many Safeguarding Reviews, including in Coventry. However, though it is an essential component of safeguarding procedures, and its application is

rooted in safeguarding adult policies and the Care Act 2014, being professionally curious is still not always embedded into practice - as is evidenced in this review.

13.1.43 However, given the length of time that has lapsed since Aaliyah's death, it is not proportionate to this Domestic Abuse Related Death Review to delve deeper into the barriers and challenges that professionals continue to face in regard to professional curiosity, but additional scrutiny is necessary to ensure that agencies are working effectively to protect individuals at risk in the future. Managing incidents and situations on face value, without exploration of a lived experience and victim perspective, will prevent an understanding of what is really going on in an abuse victim's life, leaving them having to survive alone, be misunderstood and at risk of harm. Locally, Coventry has enhanced its training for professionals to enhance professional curiosity, and in July 2024 developed a briefing 'One Minute Guide.'[21]

13.1.44 It is apparent that Children's Social Care took no steps to understand Aaliyahs clear reports of domestic abuse, instead assessing that she was equally 'to blame' for abuse in the relationship without an exploration of her lived experience and understanding of her presenting behaviours. They demonstrated conscious bias throughout the scoping period and took steps to influence other agencies in a negative way for Aaliyah. This is very worrying for the review and directly prevented Aaliyah being heard within child protection processes and given an opportunity to explain about her lived experience and challenges. Conscious bias failed Aaliyah.

13.1.45 Lesson 1

Professionals did not demonstrate being 'curious' by asking questions and thereafter seeking or verifying information from alternative sources, as required, to gain an effective understanding of Aaliyahs circumstances and which would have enhanced knowledge of Aaliyah's s lived experience and risk of harm from abuse.

13.1.46 Lesson 2

The relationship between Children's Social Care and Aaliyah failed her. Conscious bias prevented them looking widely at Aaliyah's unique situation to understand her lived experience and cultural perspective and instead focused on the impact of her substance use without helping her to address the root causes that may assist her to be a better parent, which in turn, may reduce her need for substances. A more successful relationship with FDAC and Change, Grow, Live resulted in Aaliyah reaching her goals to stop

[21] Professional Curiosity OMG 2024.pdf

drinking and an end to police callouts. Sadly, this was too late for Aaliyah, and she did not get to be with her child.

13.1.47 Recommendation 1

Agencies must evidence to Coventry Community Safety Partnership that that they are prompting and encouraging their professionals to be professionally curious, and Coventry Community Safety Partnership must gain an improved understanding of how to support agencies with this elementary practice.

13.2 Agencies Effectiveness at Identifying Aaliyah as a Victim of Domestic Abuse.

13.2.1 It can be seen by reflecting through the previous section that Aaliyah received very little direct support when reporting incidents of domestic abuse. Incidents were managed on face value and whilst there were risk assessments, they did not highlight the on-going risk to Aaliyah or consider her to be a victim at risk of domestic abuse. The review will examine why that is the case.

13.2.2 The first time Aaliyah told the police that she was suffering from domestic abuse within her marriage, she was not believed. The police were interviewing her for an offence of theft which Aaliyah freely admitted and mitigated it was a cry for help. Due to Aaliyah not wanting to discuss this further at that time, and an assessment of the circumstances from a criminal perspective, Aaliyah's explanation was dismissed with no risk assessment completed, nor any exploration into her personal circumstances within a marriage of conflicting cultures and differing expectations, and the risk that can hold. This was a missed opportunity to identify Aaliyah's risk of domestic abuse at an early point. Importantly, not being believed may impact on having confidence to make a future report. Research[22] within a key report published by 'Standing Together' , in January 2025, titled 'Fixing a Broken System: Landmark Report Demands Action on Domestic Abuse', highlights that only 20% of domestic abuse victims report their abuse so where there is a report, as here, it is vitally important for victims that all reports are positively acted on, regardless of the circumstances in which it has been reported.

13.2.3 Failing to act and record a report also fails to identify perpetrators of abuse and prevents an accurate reflection of risk of domestic abuse being considered should there be future reports. Understanding patterns of abuse is an essential element in identifying risk. Ensuring all reports are recorded allows potential

[22] https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/news/dac-report-stada-response-lrspz-8z7ft-tmp55-z6kkj-3entz Standing Together are a national charity with a role to bring communities together to end domestic abuse.

escalation of abuse to be identified and risk appropriately assessed incorporating all the facts. It prevents a subsequent report being managed as the first, with earlier risk factors missing that cannot then contribute to the true risk situation.

13.2.4 The next occasion for the police was when Aaliyah called for help, reporting she had been assaulted by her mother. Aaliyah would not make a statement, and the police assessed she was drunk and believed family members who told them that her drinking was getting worse and she was the aggressor, reflected in the fact the police recorded having seen no injuries and took her home to prevent a breach of the peace. The police were focused on child protection once they arrived, a positive, and they did complete a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA),[23] when Aaliyah refused, to indicate a standard risk existed to Aaliyah. However, their report to Children's Social Care informed them that Aaliyah was the offender against her mother, helping build a negative perspective of her parenting abilities which was to have a massive effect on her life. Again, Aaliyah was not believed, and her voice was lost. No support as a victim was offered and no consideration of Aaliyahs cultural challenges considered and the fact that there had been no reports prior to Sauron's arrival to the UK.

13.2.5 In March 2019, Aaliyah called the police to report Sauron having grabbed her throat and prevented her leaving. On attendance, officers record that Aaliyah stated that Sauron had strangled her. Whilst this element was recorded, there is no further action taken on this. It was not referenced on the DARA, and a standard risk of harm was identified. At that time, strangulation was not a specific criminal offence as it is now,[24] but at the time, West Midlands Police had, positively, identified it as a high-risk factor, with a policy stating that where it is identified, a high risk of harm will be recorded. This was good practice. Unfortunately, the policy was not followed, and strangulation was not recorded within a DARA, preventing the risk assessment being properly actioned as a high risk of harm to Aaliyah and the review has not been able to ascertain why it wasn't properly recorded.

13.2.6 The necessity for strangulation to be acknowledged as a high risk is identified within later research, published in 2024, which studied 75 domestic homicides committed by strangulation[25], and highlights that in 72% of the cases, there had been previous domestic abuse. In 68% of cases coercive behaviour had been a feature. Non-fatal previous strangulation had occurred in 59% of cases. Failing

[23] DARA: Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment introduced by the College of Policing in XX for police use only.
[24] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/70/enacted
[25] https://ifas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/DHR-Series-Report-4-A-Comparative-Analysis-17.10.24.pdf

to include the presence of reported strangulation was a missed opportunity to identify Aaliyah as a high-risk victim and ensure a MARAC[26] took place which would have been an opportunity to examine her circumstances and apply a cultural overview to her situation.

13.2.7 The police have confirmed to the review that a standard risk was based on the strangulation not being considered and that there was no known previous history of abuse recorded within the relationship. In fact, the strangulation element was dismissed because it was recorded that Aaliyah had no obvious injuries and on, positively, arresting Sauron, officers did not inform the custody team of the strangulation, reporting that Aaliyah had been grabbed. Not having recorded Aaliyahs previous report also impacted as this incident was managed as a first report with no other known history added to the risk assessment.

13.2.8 Aaliyah had been drinking, and this aspect was focused on in the police report, and her anger. Sauron counter alleged that Aaliyah had assaulted him, and he had scratches to his hand. There was no consideration that they had been caused in defence if his hands had been around Aaliyah's throat. Aaliyah would not make a statement the following morning and they released Sauron telling Aaliyah '*That if Sauron was released with no further action, then police would have no control or conditions to place on him, but that Aaliyah was happy with this outcome'*.

13.2.9 This shows a lack of understanding of the coercive nature of domestic abuse and places all responsibility for the management of abuse with Aaliyah. It is also incorrect. On a report to Children's Social Care, the police highlight that Aaliyah did have a bruise under her chin (also seen by her GP). Violence had occurred and this allows the police to consider a Domestic Violence Protection Notice[27] (DVPN). A DVPN is designed to give breathing space to victims by granting a temporary respite from their abuser and allowing a referral to support services without interference. The point at which victims seek help or leave their abuser can be when they are most at risk. The DVPN process can be pursued without the victim's active support, or even against their wishes, if this is considered necessary to protect a victim from violence or threat of violence. Additionally, the victim does not have to attend court, and this can help by removing responsibility from the victim for taking action against their abuser. However, for Aaliyah there is no compassion demonstrated for her situation, and she is not viewed as a victim or referred for services but viewed as a drunk woman who was

[26] MARAC: Multi-agency risk conference. Multi-agency forum to manage high risk victims of domestic abuse. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference Name | West Midlands Police

[27] https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/using-domestic-violence-protection-notices-and-domestic-violence-protection-orders-make-victims-safer

abusive to officers and equally to blame for violence between her and Sauron. Her demeanour was very well recorded whereas the fact she had been strangled was dismissed. Aaliyah was lost as a victim and not believed again, leaving her at risk of further abuse, regardless of her presenting demeanour. West Midlands Police report they are aware of the value of DVPN's and have increased their use today through enhanced training.

13.2.10 The police advise that in relation to this time period, West Midlands Police had been assessed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, and an issue of poor-quality investigations identified. In response, rapid change has taken place to improve the quality with a focus on victims being placed at the heart of revised processes although there is no evidence of evaluation available for this review.

13.2.11 Since this domestic abuse report by Aaliyah, West Midlands Police, from February 2025, commenced a pilot of 'Raneem's Law'. Raneem's Law ensures there are specialist domestic abuse support workers, including Coventry Haven, embedded in the police control room to provide advice and guidance to front line police officers and, where they exist, ensure intelligence concerning previous reports is included in the assessment of response. To date, there has been no formal evaluation of this new service, but early indications are that for each month of the pilot, specialist workers have evaluated in excess of 400[28] police domestic incidents to provide feedback to the police and assisted with live incidents. Interestingly, whilst the number of evaluations has remained very similar, the number of incidents needing to be regraded has reduced over the pilot as has the need to feedback for learning. The pilot has been extended until March 2026, and the review welcomes this good practice development. For Aaliyah and any reporting victim of abuse, a specialist may assist responding officers to understand a victim's perspective at an early stage and ensure their voice is heard, and risk assessed properly.

13.2.12 Another development within Coventry police station has been the introduction of an Early Intervention Team (EIT). The role of the EIT is to assess all standard and medium risk domestic abuse incidents to identify correct assessment and to evaluate if there is a high risk of harm, with an associated referral to MARAC if necessary. EIT actively support Raneem's Law and listen to incident recordings. Where an appropriate risk assessment of medium or standard risk is identified but the victim is in crisis, the EIT will provide additional support directly. The EIT support direct training to front line police staff and are co-located in Coventry

[28] Coventry Haven recording statistics seen by the review.

police station. A positive evaluation of the initial project has ensured funding has been provided to enable the EIT to continue and develop.[29]

13.2.13 The police informed Children's Social Care of the March 2019 domestic abuse incident, but omitted the strangulation, instead recording that Aaliyah and Sauron both had injuries and involved in an altercation. This influenced children's social care leaving Aaliyah open to a further negative response whilst not relaying that she was a victim and needed support. Highlighting Aaliyah as a victim subject to strangulation at this point may have helped Children's Social Care to balance their bias against her.

13.2.14 Aaliyah called the police again later in April 2019 to report that Sauron had hit her and 'smacked her head against the wardrobe' after she refused to have sex with him. Officers attended and it is recorded that both made allegations against the other, Sauron having injuries and Aaliyah did not and both were arrested. Both were subsequently recorded as a victim and a perpetrator.

13.2.15 A risk assessment was completed and, positively, did include the previous report, and a medium risk identified. However, the previous risk assessment should have been a high risk and likewise, so should this be, given the circumstances that Aaliyah was resisting having sex against her will and assaulted, a circumstance that could have prompted an investigation for attempt rape. In addition, in interview Aaliyah fully outlined her background and factors within her marriage that clearly indicated a coercive and controlling relationship, but this was not specifically identified, and nor was her situation viewed through a cultural lens to understand the stifling situation she was in and which led to arguments for which she was labelled as equally responsible when really she was at risk of on-going domestic abuse.

13.2.16 Features of a coercive[30] and controlling[31] abusive behaviour in a relationship includes but are not limited to[32]:

Isolation: The abuser may attempt to cut off the victim from their support system, limiting contact with friends and family.

Monitoring: This can include tracking the victim's movements.

Financial Control: The abuser may restrict access to money, making the victim financially dependent.

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[29] Coventry's Early Intervention Project Evaluation Report.pdf

[30] An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

[31] A range of acts designed to make a perchild subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for perchildal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

[32] https://safelives.org.uk/about-domestic-abuse/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/

Threats and Intimidation: Using threats of violence or emotional manipulation to instil fear and compliance.

13.2.17 Aaliyah told the police that Sauron was jealous, didn't want her to work, didn't like her having friends, controlled and watched how she acted and dressed and told everyone she was lying. These are all signs of coercive and controlling behaviour but were not identified, the focus being on a criminal justice outcome for the alleged abuse rather than a wider and more understanding look at the causal issues.

13.2.18 The Home Office document[33] 'Quantitative Analysis of domestic homicides, October 2022 to September 2023,' highlights that analysis of the deceased victims of homicide in an intimate relationship in that time period, shows that 47% had been subject to coercive controlling behaviour. It is therefore a significant risk factor which is why it was created as a specific criminal offence in 2015[34]. As evidence of domestic abuse, it may not be as obvious an indicator as a physical injury but where a victim outlines such features within their relationship, it should be recognised as a core feature of abuse. Failure to do so fails victims. To help prevent future victims of domestic homicide, it is essential that front line police officers in West Midlands Police identify and act on coercive and controlling behaviours to ensure risk assessments are accurate and holistic.

13.2.19 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Statutory Guidance[35] document provides advice and guidance to agencies on understanding all forms of domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. In 2015, the criminal offence of repeatedly or continuously using coercive and controlling behaviour was created and in 2024, the offence was updated to remove the requirement for couples to be co-habiting, thereby creating an offence of using coercive and controlling behaviour post separation. Both these offences were applicable to Aaliyah in terms of subsequent learning. Of note also is the fact that non-fatal strangulation was also added in the same act in 2024 as a criminal offence.

13.2.20 In October 2019, Aaliyah called the police to report that Sauron had attacked her. They had argued after Aaliyah found evidence that Sauron had been using the services of escorts and she was trying to delete intimate images of herself from his phone resulting in pulled hair and a banged head. Positively, Aaliyah

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[33] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-findings-from-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews/quantitative-analysis-of-domestic-homicide-reviews-october-2022-to-september-2023-accessible

[34] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/76

[35] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c6df068fa8f54e855dfe31/Domestic_Abuse_Act_2021_Statutory_Guidance.pdf

was acknowledged as a victim, she made a statement and completed a DARA risk assessment. Sauron was arrested the following day. However, in interview, he stated that Aaliyah demanded money, had mental health issues and lied. The police recorded that he had left his employment due to Aaliyah turning up drunk and causing issues. Sauron had scratches which Aaliyah couldn't account for, and Aaliyah had no injuries, and the police concluded there was insufficient evidence to prosecute. The police record that Aaliyah agreed to a referral to the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV), an organisation that help victims obtain civil injunctions, although it has not been possible to ascertain if that happened.

13.2.21 However, this was an opportunity to engage with Aaliyah, her positively and rarely having made a statement on the only occasion and therefore to consider her situation more widely. The DARA recorded a medium risk but did not appear to take cognisance of any previous reports or identify the existence of the previous coercive and controlling behaviour, strangulation, nor any consideration of cultural challenges for Aaliyah. Sauron's word is believed without challenge which impacted on the criminal justice outcome, empowering him over Aaliyah because his version was acted upon. This was a further reported incident prejudiced by Aaliyahs presenting behaviours with no attempt to understand the risks she faced or why she acted as she did. Due to the time elapsed since the incident, it has not been possible for the review to ascertain how Aaliyah was perceived by individual officers and how their attitude to her, and Sauron's counter allegations, may have impacted on decision making.

13.2.22 Importantly, there is no reference to Aaliyah stating that Sauron had indecent images of her on his phone or investigation of her allegation as a potential crime. It appears to have been recorded as a reason for the argument when in fact having those images is a further coercive and controlling factor. In 2019, it became an offence to cause distress by sharing indecent images although it is not possible for the review to establish Sauron's intentions. For Aaliyah, Sauron holding intimate images is further control, a fact acknowledged by the strengthening of the law in 2021, to make it easier to prosecute offences[3637].

13.2.23 Research conducted by Refuge[38], a national domestic abuse agency, published in 2023 highlights that the police have started to record more offences involving possession of indecent images. There were 26% more offences recorded in 2020 than in 2019, and a 40% increase between 2020 and 2021. In the first six

[36] https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/violence-against-women-and-girls-toolkit/domestic-or-relationship-abuse
[37] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/pdfs/ukpga_20210017_en.pdf
[38] https://refuge.org.uk/

months of 2022, more offences had been recorded than in all of 2020. Refuge comment that '*this is a positive sign, as it could suggest that both more intimate image abuse is now captured by the criminal law following the expansion of the offence, and more survivors of this form of abuse are reporting it to the police'*. However, the data is less encouraging when looking at crime outcomes. In only about 4% of all offences recorded in that period was there a charge or a summons. Specifically, the research captured that West Midlands Police received 1800 reports and charged 28 in total, a total of 1.56%. This is a situation that needs a focus locally to understand the low charge rate and improve outcomes to victims.

13.2.24 Ensuring the inclusion of the indecent image allegation within the risk assessment, to be assessed together with the previous incidents, should have indicated a high risk of harm and prompted a MARAC with direct support provided to Aaliyah. At the very least, for a further medium risk assessment, consideration could have been made for a direct referral to an IDVA[39]. In consequence, Aaliyah was left to manage the situation herself again whilst Sauron has not been identified as presenting a risk to her by his unchallenged behaviour.

13.2.25 Developed since Aaliyah was in custody, the introduction of the Early Intervention Team, ensures a specialist team member is now co-located at Coventry police station who will liaise with officers to assess cases where a suspect of domestic abuse is in custody. This would have been very beneficial to Aaliyah had that been available for her and provided an opportunity to be heard and risk assessed as a victim by a specialist regardless that she was in custody as a potential perpetrator. This is a very positive development for situations where there are counter allegations of abuse.

13.2.26 Lesson 3

West Midlands Police did not effectively identify and manage Aaliyah as a victim of on-going domestic abuse. They did not identify disclosures of coercive and controlling behaviour, strangulation or Sauron's possession of indecent images of Aaliyah as basic elements of an abusive relationship. They did not record the first disclosure of abuse which impacted on on-going risk assessments. They did not identify a high risk of harm from

[39] IDVA: Independent Domestic Violence Advisor. the role of an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) role is 'to provide independent support to individuals who are victims of criminal conduct which constitutes domestic abuse, where the support provided relates to that conduct.' 16. IDVAs are one type of advocacy service, who often work with victims who are predominantly at high risk of harm. IDVAs should deliver specialist, victim-centred emotional and practical support to victims of domestic abuse, regardless of whether a victim has chosen to report an offence to the police, whether they have ended the relationship with the perpetrator, or whether they are victims of multiple offences. idva-guidance.pdf

strangulation which also impacted on further risk assessments. They did not consider support to Aaliyah by consideration of a DVPN.

13.2.27 Lesson 4:

Opportunities to refer Aaliyah to a MARAC were missed by the police through inaccurate risk assessments that did not fully take cognisance of the features of domestic abuse faced by Aaliyah nor consider risk recorded in previous incidents.

13.2.28 It is important for the review to acknowledge that there has been a great deal of updated guidance and legislation in relation to the police management of domestic abuse since the death of Aaliyah. In particular, the joint guidance issued by the College of Policing and the National police Chiefs Council in February 2024 [40] 'Policing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) National Framework for Delivery', states that violence against women and girls is raised to the status of a national threat. This requires a police response on the same level as terrorism and will be monitored by each police force being required to complete a self-assessment to demonstrate their response locally. Whilst such an assessment is outside the scope of this review, it is acknowledged that West Midlands Police have a current VAWG policy publicly available.[41]

13.2.29 A direct impact of the police response to Aaliyah and how they recorded and referred on to Children's Social Care influenced the consequent bias against her. Aaliyah was not specifically identified as a victim of abuse to Children's Social Care and so they did not immediately see her as a victim of abuse or offer support from harm. There seems to have been no consideration by them of understanding Aaliyah's context early on when their child reported that 'Daddy hit Mummy'. The narrative was immediately the impact on their child witnessing domestic abuse with no further consideration for Aaliyah as a victim and was a missed opportunity to identify the abuse she was suffering at an early stage. Later police reports intimated that both Aaliyah and Sauron were to blame for domestic abuse in their relationship, and both arrested on one occasion, and there was no challenge to this from Children's Social Care, the focus clearly on the welfare of their child. Unfortunately for Aaliyah the bias, once ingrained, did not change until FDAC intervened. Their bias towards her encouraged Sauron to make reports against Aaliyah should she get angry, demonstrating no regard for her context at all through their interactions. The impact to Aaliyah of Sauron's effect on the family has never been considered.

[40] https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/our-work/vawg/vawg-framework-for-delivery.pdf

[41] Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) | West Midlands Police

13.2.30 To manage domestic abuse in the relationship in line with child protection procedures, Children's Social Care referred Aaliyah and Sauron to perpetrator services (Choose to Change Programme), at Relate.[42] However, on assessment Sauron took no responsibility and blamed Aaliyah and so work could not go ahead. The aim of this intervention was not to support Aaliyah directly but as a means to improve the situation between them as a couple. Children's Social Care acknowledge that once Aaliyah was labelled a perpetrator, support was not there for Aaliyah as a victim. They acknowledge that Aaliyah was not central to their work and not heard and that this situation spiralled down for Aaliyah.

13.2.31 Lesson 5

Children's Social Care did not challenge the narrative that Aaliyah was equally to blame for abuse in her marriage to Sauron leading to bias against her and a missed early opportunity to identify her as a victim of domestic abuse.

13.2.32 Panel discussion highlights that there is a different approach now with child protection practices having developed, with a much stronger emphasis on professional curiosity and an expectation that Social Workers will call out accusatory behaviours and examine areas of conflict versus domestic abuse. The review cannot assess if there has been such a change specifically but acknowledges Children's Social Care's commitment to understanding their failings with Aaliyah.

13.2.33 Aaliyah was labelled a perpetrator of abuse and not identified as a victim of abuse. Research from Safe Lives[43] provides guidance on the importance of identifying risk when a counter allegation of abuse has been made. It highlights: *'If counter allegations are not identified and resolved, agencies may be providing services to the perpetrator and inadvertently helping them isolate and control the victim'. Safe lives identify 'that perpetrators may see themselves as the aggrieved party if they have experienced a specific incident, or because they are seeking to control and isolate their partner, or ex-partner by using agency responses'.* Sauron was successful at doing this. He stated that Aaliyah was lying and he the one with injuries, which went unchallenged.

13.2.34 It is vitally important that services and professionals are aware of perpetrators who may pose as victims and not take an allegation at face value when there are on-going domestic abuse allegations. It is also important to understand why a

[42] https://www.relate.org.uk/centre/coventry-and-warwickshire/services/choose-2-change-coventry

[43] https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Responding_to_Counter_allegations_Guidance.pdf published 2023.

victim may resort to defensive or retaliatory violence. Safe lives advise that: *While retaliatory violence may be subject to sanctions, including prosecution, the context of any violence or abuse must be understood to identify a primary aggressor or victim and manage risk to all parties appropriately'*. Unfortunately, as has been seen through this review, Aaliyah has been labelled as equally to blame, or named as a suspect, without challenge and an understanding of her context. Domestic abuse training needs to incorporate an understanding of counter allegations to help identify perpetrators of abuse properly and protect true victims. Safe Lives advise that a MARAC has the skills to examine counter allegations therefore it is vitally important that high risk is identified appropriately to enhance a victim's risk being properly identified, as could have been the case for Aaliyah. Children's Social Care have also informed the review that MARAC is now included within child protection plans, providing an opportunity to better understand context.

13.2.35 Lesson 6

Safeguarding training to front line practitioners must include an understanding of counter allegations within their context and why victims may resort to retaliatory violence, to ensure all victims of domestic abuse are appropriately identified and offered services that can reduce their risk from on-going harm.

13.2.36 Good practice can be seen by Aaliyahs GP, who on noticing her bruised chin, acted on Aaliyah's report of strangulation positively, ensuring a referral to an IDVA. This led to Aaliyah engaging with Coventry Women's Aid for a short time before she disengaged but she had been provided with an opportunity for direct support and was able to be heard.

13.2.37 The Family Drug and Alcohol (FDAC), report that through their work with Aaliyah, they did consider her issues from domestic abuse and considered her to be a victim. They offered services and support to stay safe within the context of her substance use and home situation and this is good practice. FDAC report that Aaliyah was intelligent and engaging and worked hard to improve her situation.

13.2.38 Recommendation 2

The Coventry Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should ensure that their partner agencies review and revise safeguarding training to ensure it encompasses an understanding of the elements of all forms of domestic abuse and an understanding of victim context where there are counter allegations to ensure victims of domestic abuse are properly identified.

13.3 Agencies Effectiveness at Managing Aaliyah's Vulnerabilities

13.3.1 Aaliyah started relying on substances and alcohol at an early age to manage her depression at the trauma at losing her father. The impact of substance use for her is clear to see through her lived experience. Aaliyah resisted her restrictive marriage and socialised regularly with others like her who used substances and alcohol. Sadly, the consequences of her trauma impacted directly on her effectiveness as a parent and mental health, and ultimately, she was no longer able to parent her child, causing an increase in her mental health struggles and reports of feeling suicidal at times.

13.3.2 Consequently, managing Aaliyah's substance use and mental health was fundamental to Aaliyah's ability to demonstrate being a good parent and able to care for her child; doing so was a key driver for Aaliyah and she worked hard to manage to stop drinking but not substance use. The review will examine how agencies managed Aaliyah's vulnerabilities and how they worked together to support her.

13.3.3 Like many service users, Aaliyah could be chaotic and dipped in and out of services for substance use and mental health services depending on her mood and how she felt. Her GP responded well to her mental health needs when disclosed by Aaliyah and referred her to Talking Therapies. Health responded to mental health crises when they presented appropriately. Although Aaliyah did state she felt suicidal at times, she would refute this to say her child was more important and that she wouldn't harm herself.

13.3.4 Key agencies who worked with Aaliyah were Change, Grow, Live, the specialist substance support team, and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC). Much of their work was alongside Children's Social Care child protection procedures and as such, there is evidence of some multi-agency collaboration to manage Aaliyah's vulnerabilities, with a focus on her parenting. However, there was a lack of cultural awareness and assessment of Aaliyah through a cultural lens. It is clear though, that once court proceedings commenced, Aaliyah engaged with FDAC and Change, Grow, Live. She was focused and met her goals to stop drinking. Both FDAC and Change, Grow, Live demonstrated very positive advocacy for Aaliyah to help her reach her goal. A direct demonstration of feeling supported is by Aaliyah permitting Change, Grow, Live to access her medical records when she would not allow Children's Social Care to do so.

13.3.5 Unfortunately, panel discussion agrees that due to Children's Social Care's negative attitude to Aaliyah, which missed an early opportunity to identify her risk from domestic abuse and to understand her situation within her family, Aaliyah's needs were lost in the process. There was a knock-on effect for Aaliyah

who felt she had no voice and was clearly frustrated. Empathy was shown to Sauron, he was believed over Aaliyah as were her wider family, leaving Aaliyah frustrated and fighting back. This was evidenced with the meeting held with FDAC where they intervened after the social worker called Aaliyah 'rude and unco-operative'. In fact, she had missed a contact with her child for which she blamed the social worker and said that she had had enough of not being listened to. It is clear that she wasn't listened to. Whilst it cannot be ascertained how exactly this impacted on Aaliyah, sadly she wasn't able to completely give up her substance use. It feels as though it was too late for Aaliyah, so much damage had been done in the previous two years from a poor relationship with social care and their poor opinion of her, openly expressed to partners, directly impacting on her contact with her child. It would appear that she was up against a brick wall and yet she did achieve a goal to stop drinking. Earlier support and understanding may have helped Aaliyah before it got to the point of court proceedings with time running out for her to prove she could parent. Sadly, that wasn't the case for Aaliyah and FDAC had to conclude that Aaliyah could not safely parent her child, and this was agreed by the child court proceedings. This directly and immediately impacted Aaliyah's mental health and resumption of drinking. Aaliyah was now alone in covid and soon after agreed to travel to Pakistan.

13.3.6 The review panel feel it is very important to state that through covid their services were reduced, and restrictions fundamentally affected their ability to engage with Aaliyah. FDAC and Change, Grow, Live had to stop face to face contacts. The difficult meeting with social care and FDAC was on-line which doesn't help relationships or discussion, although it cannot be stated if responses in non-covid times would have altered the outcome for Aaliyah. Children's Social Care highlight the impact covid had on their service provision through published research in practice reported entitled: *'Social work and child protection beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Key challenges and good practice'*[44]. Covid was a direct barrier to engagement with Aaliyah.

13.3.7 Aaliyah did not always engage with agencies, and it is apparent there were other significant barriers to engagement for her. A focus on core agency tasks such as child protection, or a criminal justice outcome prevented a wider look at Aaliyah's needs through a lack of professional curiosity to understand Aaliyah's situation and was a barrier to providing services. A key barrier was Aaliyah not being believed when she tried to access services. As can be seen through the review, the police and Children's Social Care did not listen to and understand

[44] https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/fs5jd1du/social-work-and-child-protection-beyond-the-covid-19-pandemic_web.pdf

Aaliyah and indeed, Aaliyah stated she was fed up at not being heard. Often when she reported abuse, it directly impacted on how she was perceived as a parent which must reduce faith in reporting and a feeling that agencies did not have her personal best interests at heart. It is clear that a lack of cultural competence was also a barrier to engagement because no one understood her situation within her restrictive marriage and how it affected her mental health.

13.3.8 A further barrier is seen when Aaliyah did engage and was referred for mental health support to Talking Therapies, but panel discussion revealed that they were reluctant to support Aaliyah because, at the time, they would not take on patients with domestic abuse or substance use issues, but this has since changed.

13.3.9 Lesson 7

There were barriers to engagement for Aaliyah through a lack of being believed, a lack of understanding of her needs through poor professional curiosity and a focus on core tasks other than Aaliyah's needs. Covid restrictions also impacted on services for Aaliyah.

13.3.10 Lesson 8

A poor relationship and a lack of understanding of Aaliyah's lived experience by Children's Social Care impacted directly on Aaliyah and added to her poor mental health preventing timely interventions with specialist substance agencies. Change, Grow, Live and FDAC did support and work effectively with Aaliyah to which she responded and demonstrated abstinence from alcohol and a cessation of police reports. However, it was too late for Aaliyah to demonstrate competency to parent, and she was not able to prevent a court order to place her child away from her resulting in a relapse to substance use and a further mental health crisis.

13.4 Agencies Effectiveness at Identifying Aaliyah's risk from Honour Based Abuse.

13.4.1 Aaliyah died in unexplained circumstances in Pakistan and whilst the review cannot state that she died as a result of honour-based violence, it can examine if agencies had an opportunity to understand if Aaliyah was at risk of honour-based violence due to her circumstances and offered support to decrease that risk and ultimately to have prevented her travelling to Pakistan.

13.4.2 As can be seen through this report, Aaliyah was an Asian British woman, married to a first cousin from Pakistan and that the marriage did not work for her due to her culture differing to that of Sauron and the impact this had. Aaliyah's brother explains that their Pakistani culture states that once a female marries into a

family, they become a member of that family and are a possession; that the male hierarchy is significant and they set the rules to be followed, and it is about respecting that family. Sauron was seen as being culturally respectful within the family and he used the religion and culture they and their families shared to discredit Aaliyah's independence and how she was living. He also influenced those in the community who looked down on her due to her drinking and using drugs. There remained a lot of influence from Sauron's family from Pakistan for the marriage once they both came back to the UK. As such, although Aaliyah was an independent British woman, she was very much subject to Pakistani culture and pressure to be a good obedient wife. Although Aaliyah and Sauron were from the Muslim community, the review distinguishes between religion and culture and acknowledges that it is the cultural factors from their respective families that influenced their values and not religious beliefs[45].

13.4.3 There is very little evidence that Aaliyah was viewed by agencies through a cultural lens. The one agency who did, Coventry Haven offered Aaliyah a referral to a BAME[46] organisation but Aaliyah refused expressing concerns about potential judgement due to ending her marriage and her history of substance use. This is a very powerful statement of just how impactive family honour and being perceived within your community is felt by those affected and is a strong barrier to preventing speaking out.

13.4.4 For context in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls in Aaliyah and Sauron's family culture, the UN Pakistan organisation[47], highlights that Pakistan ranks 130/139 on the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2021. It reports that Patriarchal norms and gender bias result in women experiencing different forms of violence against women. It is reported that 34 per cent of married women have experienced domestic violence by their husband; and 56 per cent of women who experienced physical/ sexual violence did not seek any help. More than 80 per cent of women reported facing harassment in public places, yet 90.3 per cent do not consider sexual harassment to be a crime.

13.4.5 Specifically, the Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies research published in 2019, entitled 'The Social Costs of violence Against Women and Girls on Survivors, their families and Communities in Pakistan[48],' highlights a study

1. [45] Religion is a system of beliefs, rituals, and practices that relate to the spiritual, supernatural, or divine, involving the worship of a deity or multiple deities.
2. Culture is the collective set of values, beliefs, customs, language, and practices shared by a group or society, encompassing various aspects of life, including religion.

[46] Black and Minority Ethnic organisation

[47] https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan/ending-violence-against-women-evaw

[48] https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0caf/2058979e8fcd39621c041e13e3873775b42f.pdf#:~:text=Our%20s

conducted in 2012-2013 (the time that Aaliyah married), in rural Pakistan, that found that:

- one quarter of women experienced control in the form of husband's jealousy or anger if they spoke to other men
- 16% reported their husbands wanted to know where they were at all times
- customary practices such as bride exchange and honour killings remain prevalent and contribute to violence against women
- social norms give men decision-making authority
- gender unequal norms promote the idea that a woman's father, husband, brother or child are responsible for protecting the family's honour
- These social norms legitimise men's control over women and that violence is seen as an appropriate and legitimate mechanism to control women
- 43% of women in Pakistan believe a husband is justified in beating his wife if she burns the food, argues with him or goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children or if she refuses to have sexual intercourse.
- domestic violence is considered a private matter and spousal abuse rarely seen as a crime.
- divorce is discouraged and women feel unable to dissolve even abusive marriages.

13.4.6 Aaliyahs wider family remained in a rural village in Pakistan, and her mother retained the family traditions whilst in the UK. The influences on Aaliyahs marriage from her culture would have been immense and the review has established that Aaliyah was conflicted between her westernised independence and trying to make her marriage work and please her family who meant so much to her.

13.4.7 Specifically for Aaliyah, the many risk factors as perceived by her culture and which would have affected the family honour are that:

- She brought perceived shame at wishing to get divorced
- She brought perceived shame through substance use
- She had committed a criminal offence of burglary and previously cautioned for theft
- She argued with her husband and challenged his role as head of the household

tudy%20addresses%20this%20evidence%20gap%20by%20exploring,it%2C%20as%20well%20as%20their%20relatives%20and%20communities.

- She refused to have sex with Sauron
- She reported abusive incidents to the police
- She took the decision to end a pregnancy without telling Sauron
- She lost custody of her child following legal proceedings
- She was blamed by Sauron as the reason he also lost custody of their child
- She stated her intention of not supporting Sauron's spousal visa
- She did not specifically practice Islamic religious traditions
- She frequented bars and pubs with friends away from her husband

13.4.8 Apart from Coventry Women's Aid, no agency demonstrated any cultural awareness of Aaliyahs position and did not consider any potential risk from harm she may have faced.

13.4.9 Coventry is recognised as a city of 'peace and reconciliation'[49], advocating an open approach to all. Being culturally aware in Coventry, where there is a high proportion of residents subject to cultural traditions that could be affected by family honour, is now essential to identify and protect potential victims. According to the Census 2021[50], the majority, 55.3%, of Coventry's total population is White British, which includes English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish. This is notably lower than West Midlands region's figures (71.8%) and national figures (73.5%) and it shows the proportion of Coventry's population who are of White British ethnicity has fallen in the 10 years since the last Census in 2011, when it was 66.6%. It means that Coventry's population is made up of a notably higher percentage of people from ethnic minority groups compared to the national average. The second largest broad ethnic group in Coventry is Asian/Asian British (18.5%).

13.4.10 Coventry accepts that due to the above average number of ethnic minority communities, they are undergoing a learning process in how to identify and respond to the change in demographic. It is commendable that Coventry Community Safety Board recognise this need and commissioned this DARDR which highlights the risks to domestic abuse victims that are currently hidden to services. A cultural lens must now be applied routinely to understand the impact of cultural family pressures on victims decision making, decisions to disclose and seek help, and recognise that an individual needs help when, for example as here, Aaliyah relays her marital position to the police when arrested,

[49] https://coventrycityofpeace.uk/

[50] https://www.coventry.gov.uk/facts-coventry/population-demographics/3#:~:text=The%20second%20largest%20broad%20ethnic%20group%20in%20Coventry,shows%20that%2043.9%25%20of%20Coventry%27s%20population%20are%20Christian.

clearly outlining the situation she is in but where currently, there is no focus at all on what she has said or professional curiosity displayed to identify the hidden cultural risk.

13.4.11 Aaliyah's brother explained that in their culture, families are encouraged to *'keep things within,'* keeping issues or conflict internally within the family so as not to bring attention or shame; that once other professionals or services become involved it takes away the family having ownership of what input they have. Aaliyah's brother states this is more so when the police become involved for a number of reasons such as how this looks to the wider community but also concern of the repercussions to their loved one. He also explained that regarding the incident where Aaliyah reacted to Sauron having contacted escorts, should it become public knowledge that someone in the family was using escorts or having affairs outside of marriage, or, as Sauron, had a gambling habit, this would reflect badly on his and the whole family's character. On that occasion, Aaliyah's brother believes Aaliyah was responding to the impact to her self-esteem but then was judged for 'instigating an argument'. He is aware that Aaliyah would have always worried about her family responses as well as herself, even if she didn't always care about wider culture. The family strongly believe she wanted to protect them from what was happening so tried to keep it to herself and deal with it herself which is why she internalised things and resorted to drink and drugs.

13.4.12 Children's Social Care did not consider cultural risk and family pressure when considering Aaliyah's potential to parent and assess the family's motivation when they reported her for substance use and generally being a 'bad mother'. This will increase Aaliyah's frustrations and may be a cause for her vocal resistance and witnessed arguments within the family. She was alone. The impact of not having custody of her child, culturally, may create risk of honour-based abuse for Aaliyah and this must be considered going forwards for others in Aaliyah's position.

13.4.13 Given the increase in communities in the UK who live by cultural traditions, it is incumbent on safeguarding agencies to identify victims of potential honour-based abuse and consider this at every interaction with women, or men, likely to be affected. Disclosures will not be forthcoming due to family shame so professionals must think about the potential for honour-based abuse, especially in a situation such as Aaliyahs where it is clear that she and Sauron are from conflicting cultures, let alone where she actually discloses on the rare occasion about her situation. Not recognising such risk leaves victims to continue in a coercive and controlling relationship, fighting to be heard, resisting the cultural pressures, as Aaliyah did, which in turn heightens their cultural risk.

13.4.14 However, to be effective, the definition of honour-based violence needs to expand to encompass the risks to victims such as Aaliyah. Currently, there is no legal definition for honour-based abuse. The law focuses on violence, incorporating offences for forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There are varying views on whether honour-based abuse should be linked to domestic abuse given it can be perpetrated by wider family members. It is a confusing picture which without specific legislation to widen the definition, currently requires evidence of associated specific offences such as rape, threatening behaviour, coercive and controlling behaviour etc., all of which will focus on the specific crime and not the cultural risk itself which, while useful in itself for a criminal justice perspective, defeats the purpose for identifying honour-based abuse.

13.4.15 It is helpful that the National Police Chief's Council[51] (2015), have adopted a wider definition: *' an incident of crime, involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (including psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and, or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and / or community's code of honour'.* However, it is not law and relies on police forces identifying and coding honour-based abuse specifically where disclosed, or within investigations for wider offences. It is not clear to this review how West Midlands Police record reports of honour-based abuse. The latest national data published by the Home Office[52] identify an increase in honour-based abuse offences of 1% between the end of 2022 (2,871) and 2023 (2,905). Of the 2905 offences recorded, 84 were for Female Genital Mutilation and 172 for Forced Marriage. Of note however, is that 2018 more general honour-based abuse incidents once investigated were found not to be a specific offence. This needs to change. Of those that were prosecuted nationally, Karma Nirvana[53] report that the Crown Prosecution Service data tables released in July 2025 show that Honour-based abuse has the lowest conviction rate of all flagged crimes at 48.4%. This compares to Forced Marriage at 53% and Domestic Abuse at 75%. The reasons given are that a victim or witness withdraws at a rate of 24.2% and evidential gaps consist of 22.1%. Given the pressures on individuals from families and the isolating nature of reporting within their community, it is hardly surprising victims withdraw or there

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51 https://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Final%20NPCC%20HBA%20strategy%202015%202018December%202015.pdf

52 https://www.saverauk.co.uk/national-data-shows-increase-in-honour-based-abuse-hba-offences/#:~:text=In%20the%20year%20ending%20March%202023%2C%20there%20were,with%20the%20year%20ending%20March%202022%20%282%2C871%20offences%29.

53 https://karmanirvana.org.uk/news-item/honour-based-abuse-has-the-lowest-conviction-rate-of-all-flagged-crimes-across-england-wales-in-cps-24-25-data-summary/

is a lack of evidence where it is one word against a wider family. Victims need support and confidence to know what they are experiencing is not only morally wrong but a crime and that organisations exist to support them.

13.4.16 Savera UK[54], and Karma Nirvana[55] are organisations dedicated to supporting survivors of honour-based abuse (HBA). They are campaigning for a legal definition to enhance understanding of an issue they believe is vastly underreported to them with many cases going unidentified due to a lack of understanding and ability to recognise them. They state: *"A clear statutory definition for HBA is absolutely vital to improved understanding, identification and reporting of HBA, which in turn facilitates more effective and appropriate responses. This proposed definition has been developed by specialist, frontline services from across the UK with vast collective experience in working to end HBA. It will protect those of risk by giving professionals a robust framework to work with and it will empower survivors by recognising the severity of their risks/threat and making it easier for them to report and access help. It will also allow consistent reporting that feeds into improved data collection, which can be used to inform policy and service delivery. As a service we will be adopting this definition as our standard, alongside our sector peers, and we urge the government to do the same."*

13.4.17 The proposed sector-wide definition[56] is: '*An incident or pattern of violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, control or abuse (including but not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, economic, spiritual, faith-related or emotional abuse) motivated by the perpetrator's perception that an individual has shamed, or may shame, the perpetrator, the family, or community or has otherwise broken, or may break, the perceived norms of the community's accepted behaviours, including by speaking out about the abuse and where the perception of shame may also prevent a victim from accessing support or help'.* So much of this definition is seen in Aaliyah's situation.

13.4.18 The review acknowledges and welcomes the Home Office consultation process to establish a definition and note their response[57]: *'Currently there is a definition of HBA used by the criminal justice system, but we recognise there is more that can be done to raise the level of consistency of understanding regarding HBA in Government and across statutory services. The Home Office is considering this alongside other measures to prevent HBA from happening, support victims and*

[54] https://www.saverauk.co.uk/mp-asks-government-for-statutory-definition-for-hba/
[55] https://karmanirvana.org.uk/

[56] https://karmanirvana.org.uk/campaigns/current-campaigns/define-hba/
[57] https://www.saverauk.co.uk/mp-asks-government-for-statutory-definition-for-hba/

bring perpetrators to justice. More detail will be set out in our forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy."

13.4.19 Lesson 9

Aaliyah was at risk of honour-based abuse due to the particular risk features of her situation. However, she was not seen through a cultural lens by key agencies who focused on the presenting situation as relevant to their key priorities without considering the existence of risk from honour-based abuse she faced. In consequence, Aaliyah's risk was not identified.

13.4.20 Lesson 10

The current legal definition of honour-based violence does not reflect the reality for those at risk from wider honour-based abuse and prevents honour-based incidents being recognised, reported, recorded and managed as a crime. It prevents victims identifying their situation and seeking support from specialist organisations.

13.4.21 Recommendation 3

The Home Office should take cognisance of the issues raised in this report that identify the need for a wider legal definition for incidents that are honour-based to identify such incidents as a crime to enhance victim safety and wider public awareness necessary to enhance reporting.

13.5 Issues surrounding Aaliyah's death

13.5.1 Following the court decision to place her child away from her, Aaliyah was devastated and started drinking again, having abstained for six months. She had a mental health crisis very shortly afterwards. Aaliyah was already on court bail for a criminal offence, having pleaded guilty, and, according to her brother, was very aware of the need to undertake a pre-sentence report by the Probation Service as well as the need to attend court in November 2021.

13.5.2 During 2021, Aaliyah had her own tenancy, having separated from Sauron, but he still stayed with her on and off although there were no police, or other agency reports in this time. She was deeply saddened at only being able to see her child once a week and under supervision, which she did throughout, meeting at a Pizza Hut. Due to covid, Aaliyah then had to isolate alone, which is why Aaliyah's brother believed she allowed Sauron to stay at her flat. Also, Sauron had not disclosed their separation to immigration and was still dependant on Aaliyah due to his spousal visa which had to be updated and reported on every two and a half years. Sauron had not notified immigration of their on and off relationship and that he hadn't always lived with her, or that their child was no longer in their care. Overall, during that time, Aaliyah's brother highlights that this was a very

stressful time for the family, especially their mother and sister who were now taking care of Aaliyah's child, both of whom had been significant in the family court proceedings. Contact between the family was by telephone mainly, due to covid, and this limited what the family knew about Aaliyah prior to her travelling to Pakistan.

13.5.3 Aaliyah was in contact with Probation before she travelled but the pre-trial report could not be completed, and it was deferred until her return. On the day she left, Aaliyah saw her GP, but Aaliyah did not say why she was travelling.

13.5.4 Aaliyahs family believe that Sauron persuaded Aaliyah to go to get away from the upcoming stress of the court case and the previous family court case. Also, their eldest uncle had died the year before, an important elder described as the 'gel for the family, holding them together'. There was an anniversary being held to pay respects and this was another reason for Aaliyah to go. The review also notes that Aaliyah has told professionals before that she has previously found peace in Pakistan.

13.5.5 Aaliyahs siblings did not want Aaliyah to travel for fear for her safety. They believe Aaliyah recognised a risk hence why she took out a life insurance policy to an unnamed beneficiary to prompt an enquiry into her death, if necessary, but she never said directly to family who and what this risk was. Aaliyah's brother doesn't believe Aaliyah would have discussed those concerns with anyone outside of or within the family as she wouldn't have fully known how to express her concerns. Any threats by Sauron were only seen as that, a threat. Sauron arranged her going abroad under a pretence of it being good for her. He arranged the money and the booking of her ticket, but it was only one way, even though she would have told him she needed to be back for court.

13.5.6 Whilst it cannot be concluded that Aaliyah was aware of a risk of honour-based violence once in Pakistan, the statistics for such an offence show the very real risk that does exist. In 2016 the BBC reported[58] the rise of honour killings, *'that nearly 1,100 women were killed in Pakistan the previous year by relatives who believed they had dishonoured their families, the country's independent Human Rights Commission says. In its annual report, the commission said 900 more women suffered sexual violence and nearly 800 took, or tried to take, their own lives. In 2014 about 1,000 women died in honour-related attacks and 869 in 2013'.* Correspondents reported that a large number of such crimes go unreported in Pakistan.

13.5.7 This risk continues. In November 2022, the UK Government produced a guidance document from its UK Visa and Immigration department 'Country

[58] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-35943732

policy and information note: Women fearing gender-based violence, Pakistan, November 2022[59]', amended June 2025. This guidance assesses risk to travellers and states that '*a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm and that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR).

13.5.8 Specifically in relation to sexual and gender-based violence, the guidance reiterates that there are approximately 1000 reported honour killings annually and advises that: *'The majority of women who are victims of gender-based violence, activists contend, are from the country's low and middle classes and their deaths are often not recorded or disregarded. 'Women's lives in rural areas differ considerably from those in metropolitan places such as Islamabad, where they enjoy relative safety. Landlords retain social, economic and political clout in rural parts of the country, where feudal structures persist and the administration and police often function subserviently to these chieftains.'*

13.5.9 Aaliyah travelled in 2021 prior to this guidance but the generic Foreign Office advice warning, linked to specific travel advice to Pakistan, that the risk of violence towards women in 'many countries', did exist. Aaliyah would have needed a visa to travel, having been born in the UK. This visa does not appear to need a return plane ticket to enter the country[60]. Aaliyah's family are unaware of the logistics around how she gained the travel visa as at the time Pakistan was a red listed country to travel to due to covid restrictions. They were aware that Aaliyah faced no conditions to the bail (for the burglary charge) regarding her ability to travel.

13.5.10 On arrival in Pakistan, Aaliyah's brother reports that Aaliyah dropped her smart phone at the airport in Islamabad which meant she couldn't unlock it or use it. The village she was in, Bandi, Kashmir province, was very remote and had no phone access or shops to buy another. She had to wait to be escorted to the city by male cousins where she was told it would cost too much to fix. Aaliyah bought another, a basic model, however there was no Wi-Fi to use it in the village. Most of the contact with family at home was only when she was in the

[59] ttps://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pakistan-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-women-fearing-gender-based-violence-pakistan-november-2022-accessible#preface

[60] https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/pakistan

city or on the outskirts of the village due to signal. With this throwaway phone, Aaliyah was limited to brief texts only. She asked often of her child.

13.5.11 Whilst in the village Aaliyah initially stayed with her aunt, (her mother's sister and Sauron's mother). However, after an argument caused when Aaliyah found that her personal belongings had all been searched, she moved to the house of her uncle, within the same compound. Their mother was told by Sauron's mother that Aaliyah had been embarrassing them and after she moved out to her uncles, was threatening that she would divorce Sauron. Their aunt said they wanted the family here to 'speak to her.'

13.5.12Aaliyah had planned to travel back on the 1st of November and although they cannot verify this, her UK family believe she had bought a ticket using money sent to her by her friend in the UK who had access to her benefits. The family have ruled out an act of suicide due to Aaliyah having sent a text message on the day she died (oct 11th) to her sister asking for a pickup from Heathrow Airport on the 1st of November 2021. They are also concerned that Aaliyah, whilst in Pakistan expressed that she would report her estranged husband to the Home Office for domestic abuse, an action that would have ensured Sauron's return to Pakistan.

13.5.13 Aaliyah's brother states that most of the information about what was happening while Aaliyah was in Pakistan has come from the other side of the family and is their version of events. The family believe she was unlawfully killed because Aaliyah had no pre-existing conditions, and that the circumstances appeared suspicious due to the 'story' changing. A lot of their information has been gained by Aaliyah's UK family, especially the siblings, pushing for answers. Aaliyah was reported by the Pakistani family to have complained of 'feeling unwell.' She was taken by a male uncle and female cousin family member to a doctor's house because it was too far to go to a hospital but apparently had passed away prior to arriving. The doctor, (a family associate), when challenged by the UK family, said the cause of death was a blood clot which travelled from her leg, however there had been no reports of chest pains. There was no examination as to why a healthy young women would die suddenly and no postmortem.

13.5.14 Aaliyah's UK family strongly believe that Aaliyah's behaviour was 'looked down on' and the family in Pakistan believed she was reflectingly badly on them; that Sauron expected to use the death of his UK wife and having a child as a guarantee he would be given leave to remain. They are aware that he has since been approaching other UK national females for another arranged marriage. In fact, Sauron was not granted leave to remain because he had lost custody of their child alongside Aaliyah. The review notes that Aaliyahs life insurance policy was invalidated due to a mix-up with Aaliyahs first payment.

13.5.15 Following her death, a great shock received by a phone call, Aaliyahs UK family asked for her to be taken to a hospital, but this was refused. She was buried within 24 hours of her death in the village in line with cultural expectations. Sauron was at the funeral, but her UK family could not get there due to visa requirements.

13.5.16 Aaliyah's UK family have never been told by their family in Pakistan accurate information or clarity on the circumstances of her death. Aaliyah's phones were reluctantly returned to them missing the sim cards.

13.5.17 Aaliyah's family are still deeply distressed by her unexpected death. They have not been able understand what happened to her. They reported the death of Aaliyah to UK authorities within a couple of days due to their suspicions; however, they report that the UK Police closed Aaliyah's case within a week. The Inspector who closed the matter stated he could not justify using public funds in relation to this matter. Another officer told Aaliyah's brother that there had been a lot of calls to the emergency services and that Aaliyah was 'a bit of a burden' to the services. On reflection, Aaliyah's brother questions how this type of language or exchange with police or emergency services worker, if directed at his sister, would have impacted her. He queries whether their interpretation of Aaliyah was bias and clouded by their interactions with her in very chaotic but vulnerable moments and how this must have influenced Aaliyah's view of reaching out for help? The review cannot answer that, but it certainly accords with what can be seen through analysis of the police involvement (and Children's Social Care), involvement and lack of professional curiosity to understand Aaliyah's context.

13.5.18 Aaliyah's family report that they lodged multiple complaints regarding the Police decision to close and were told if new information/ evidence came to light to report this to UK Police. The family did this as requested and the Inspector who reviewed the original report again closed the file without even reviewing the fresh evidence.

13.5.19 The family then lodged another complaint with The Police Commissioner's Office, which was passed to an Acting Inspector who, for the first time, visited the family and listened and took on family concerns and is currently conducting a review of all the evidence the family submitted to the Police about Aaliyah's file. That review is still ongoing having begun on the 1st of November 2024, however neither the family nor this review can obtain any update.

13.5.20 The family contacted the Foreign Office, who, the family report did absolutely nothing apart from providing a list of Solicitors in Pakistan. The family contacted Solicitors on the list who stated to send them £10,000 so they could get an arrest made in Pakistan. Some numbers on the list were incorrect and not useable.

13.5.21 The family contacted Pakistan authorities, and they stated the family had to travel to Pakistan to lodge a First Incident Report, which only can be done in Pakistan. Due to threats and risk this avenue was never ventured by the family.

13.5.22 Eventually the family contacted AAFDA, who on their behalf instigated the request for this DHR.

13.5.23 There are no set procedures in circumstances such as Aaliyahs. Unfortunately, whilst the UK Government advises on bereavement information for Pakistan[61], and highlights that a postmortem is required by their law in cases of homicide and murder, this needs to be raised as an issue extremely quickly to comply with Islamic burial procedures and so this was not an option given the UK family had no control over the situation.

13.5.24 A Coroner in England and Wales may be required to investigate a death where the circumstances necessitate such an inquiry, but the body must be repatriated, which again was not an option for Aaliyah.

13.5.25 The organisation 'Murdered Abroad[62]' advises that the UK police may assist in an investigation into the death of a British National abroad in certain circumstances similar to Aaliyah's case. These include where:

- Where the suspect is a British national there are certain circumstances where the suspect can be prosecuted in England and Wales.
- The death involves a conspiracy to murder, which has taken place in England and Wales, but the actual death occurs overseas.
- Bereaved families request police to assist in establishing the circumstances of the death of a British national. This can arise where the family are dissatisfied with an investigation overseas and seek advice on murder investigations. It is important to note that a police force in England and Wales has no power to conduct criminal investigations overseas and the primacy of the relevant foreign jurisdiction must be respected.

13.5.26 The review cannot comment on the appropriateness for a police investigation for Aaliyah but would state that the family have had to fight very hard to be supported with little understanding of what can be achieved to support them in understanding how Aaliyah died.

13.5.27 The review also cannot comment on how many British women may be killed abroad in suspicious circumstances as a result of honour-based violence, due to a lack of available data. The review can, though, highlight the very real need to

[61] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-someone-dies-in-pakistan
[62] https://www.murdered-abroad.org.uk/police

raise awareness of the risks of honour-based killings, violence and abuse for British Women subject to cultural pressures, and to ask that there is better information, support and advice available for families who believe this may apply to their loved ones. As a nation, we should be standing up for our citizens who die abroad in suspicious circumstances. For areas such as Coventry who have a higher than average population of British Asian communities, it is vitally important that services understand the risk to women within those communities, including the wider communities abroad that have so much influence, and the very real risk of harm they may be subject to and complete lack of rights and/or a voice within their family, just because they are a woman.

13.5.28 Lesson 11

Women in Pakistan are at risk of honour-based violence and killings today. Family honour is a key feature of cultural belief and women within a patriarchal system have reduced rights than in the UK. A lack of data prevents an understanding of how prevalent this issue may be for British women who travel to Pakistan. Public awareness needs to be raised to highlight the risks women such as Aaliyah may face when under pressure to travel to Pakistan. Local safeguarding agencies need to understand the risks and encompass them within practice. Support services about where help and guidance may be found need to be known about in Coventry.

13.5.29 Lesson 12

Whilst it cannot be established that Aaliyah died subject to a domestic homicide, it is not right that families are left not knowing where to go for help to understand how a death abroad occurred, or to have to make many formal complaints to be heard. There needs to be development of guidance for families and an agreed publicly available standard for when the British Police may consider investigation.

13.5.30 Recommendation 4

The Coventry Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should reassure themselves that their partner agencies safeguarding policy and procedures encompass an understanding of honour-based abuse and the implications for victims within wider safeguarding investigations to identify, support and reduce risk to victims of honour-based abuse. Also, to enhance identification of women at potential risk of honour-based violence who come into contact with services, ensure a routine risk assessment and advice is considered, supported by the development of guidance for victims that provide an understanding of where they may go for options and support, especially if they are known to be travelling out of the UK.

13.5.31 Recommendation 5

The Home Office should take cognisance of the findings of this review and consider a national campaign to raise awareness of the risks to women from Honour-based violence and abuse when travelling to Pakistan and which promotes where advice and support may be found.

13.5.32 The Home Office policy paper 'Learning from loss: ensuring the lessons from domestic homicide reviews lead to change', as updated on the 5th of August 2025, highlights that of all national recommendations made by domestic homicide reviews, the Home Office had the majority. However, the report finds that only 25% of such recommendations were completed. It states: '*Most shockingly, in the majority of reviews, the national body or government department was not aware of the recommendation made for them or was unable to confirm that they were aware (56%). Government departments could not confirm that they had updated the CSP on implementation of their action*'.

13.5.33 This review respectfully requests that the national recommendation is acted upon, and feedback provided to Coventry Community Safety Partnership in a timely manner.

13.5.34 **Recommendation 6**

Coventry Community Safety Partnership should disseminate this Overview Report to the Coventry Safeguarding Adult's Board and Coventry Safeguarding Children's Board for them to take cognisance of the learning and incorporate into policy and procedure where relevant.

14 Conclusions

14.1 Aaliyah was a British Asian woman, who was born, raised and educated in Coventry. She was an out-going, independent woman who enjoyed a westernised outlook on life. Sadly, when visiting family in a remote village in Pakistan, Aaliyah died suddenly on the day she was planning her return to Coventry. She was 35 years of age. Her cause of death has not been able to be established, however, this DARDR has considered agency interactions with Aaliyah prior to travel to Pakistan due to a history of reported domestic abuse and concerns that she may have been at risk of honour-based abuse.

14.2 Aaliyah was born in Coventry. Her parents had immigrated to Coventry from a small rural village in Kasmir, Pakistan prior to her birth. Her mother retained her cultural traditions and did not speak English at home, remaining close to her sister and wider family back in Pakistan. When 14 years old, tragedy struck Aaliyah when she was with her beloved father when he died suddenly on the

street. This resulted in Aaliyah suffering trauma and depression for which Aaliyah used alcohol, cannabis and later, cocaine, to help her cope.

14.3 Aaliyah taking substances caused pressure within her family and Aaliyah's mother was under cultural pressure from her wider family to reduce perceived family shame. At 25 years of age, her mother took Aaliyah to her village in Pakistan where Aaliyah married her first cousin, (mothers sisters' son). Aaliyah agreed to this, but it resulted in an unhappy marriage due to cultural incompatibility. Her husband, Sauron, had an ambition to come to the UK but was uneducated and entrenched in cultural patriarchal values which were the opposite of Aaliyah's westernised freedoms. As such, they came from vastly different cultural backgrounds whilst sharing the same wider family whose marital beliefs were traditionally patriarchal; thereby placing pressure on Aaliyah to conform to family wishes versus her own values and needs.

14.4 Aaliyah and Sauron had a child quickly, and although staying in contact, did not live together until Sauron came to the UK in the spring of 2018 when their child was five years old and a spousal visa gained. Sauron did not speak English and initially they lived together with Aaliyah's mother.

14.5 Aaliyah and Sauron's cultural differences soon caused arguments mainly because Sauron did not approve of Aaliyah's drinking, socialising and taking substances. The first report of domestic abuse by Aaliyah to the police was in July 2018, followed by a further 4 reports between then and October 2019. However, none of the reports concluded that Aaliyah was a victim of domestic abuse, instead Sauron was believed when he made counter-allegations against her. An opportunity to identify high risk of harm to Aaliyah and a referral to MARAC was missed when the police failed to include evidence of strangulation within a risk assessment. Aaliyah was perceived as equally to blame for abuse and on one occasion, arrested after she called for help when Sauron again made a counter-allegation.

14.6 The police did not show professional curiosity towards Aaliyah and did not believe her. They did not listen when she outlined clear circumstances of coercive and controlling behaviour. They did not consider her situation through a cultural lens despite her outlining the difficulties for her in a relationship so culturally different to Sauron's, in mitigation when under arrest.

14.7 Unfortunately, Aaliyah was not supported by Children's Social Care who showed active bias against her and openly disrespected Aaliyah to partner agencies. Children's Social Care showed no empathy for Aaliyah or made any attempt to understand her context. Whilst their focus was properly on the impact of domestic abuse in the family on Aaliyah and Sauron's child, there was little

support for Aaliyah to be a better parent. Reports made by Aaliyah to the police resulted in further restrictions on her ability to parent her child due to being blamed on every occasion as being equally to blame when in fact, Aaliyah had reported being assaulted when she refused to have sex with Sauron and assaulted again when she complained to Sauron having found intimate images of herself on his phone together with contact with escort agencies. Aaliyah was not listened to and her reality not included in social care assessments or criminal justice outcomes. Safeguarding practice must include an understanding of Counter-Allegations to better identify and protect victims of domestic abuse.

14.8 Aaliyahs family reported her substance use to Children's Social Care and Sauron was listened to, shown empathy and supported. Aaliyah was isolated and losing control of her child which directly impacted on her mental health and increased her substance use. This is turn impacted on her ability to parent and ensured Children's Social care commenced legal proceedings to place her child with her sister. The attitude of Children's Social Care, as recorded by partner agencies, and the police impacted on Aaliyah's resilience resulting in mental health crises at key points of losing custody of her child. Sadly, by the time she was able to work effectively with support services, which she did through positive relationships with Change, Grow, Live and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court, and demonstrated abstinence from alcohol for six months, (although not cocaine), it was too late, and she lost custody permanently and with reduced contact. Aaliyah's needs had been completely lost in the child protection process.

14.9 The review has ascertained that Aaliyah was not viewed through a lens of understanding her cultural situation. Professional curiosity was not apparent, and agencies did not understand her lived experience. There is no evidence that the impact of Sauron moving into the family home was assessed.

14.10 In consequence, agencies did not consider that Aaliyah may be at risk of honour-based abuse when in fact, she was at risk of harm by the many ways in which she could be perceived to have brought cultural shame on her family. Aaliyah did not openly disclose such a risk but there needs to be development in safeguarding practices to ensure that victims in Aaliyah's situation, especially where there is a clear cultural difference and poor relationship in consequence, are identified through professional curiosity, and an understanding that women (and some men), are at risk from honour-based harms. Victims of honour-based abuse will not disclose easily having been schooled in keeping issues within the family to protect the family honour. Professionals must acknowledge its existence, identify and risk assess routinely and signpost to support. Public awareness needs to be raised, especially in Coventry which has a higher-than-average

British Asian community. The Government need to consider widening the legal definition from violence to a wider definition of abuse to better protect victims through the criminal justice system and to help increase reporting rates and referrals for specialist support.

14.11 Whilst it cannot be concluded that Aaliyah was unlawfully killed in Pakistan, she certainly died in circumstances that would warrant a full investigation in the UK. Aaliyahs family do not know how she died, and they need to understand as best they can to help them grieve. There are no guidelines in existence currently that provide a standard for police forces when deciding whether to consider investigating a suspicious death abroad. This needs to change to support families who have lost a loved one abroad in suspicious circumstances.

14.12 Public awareness also needs to be raised to acknowledge the fact that women are at risk of honour-based violence and death in rural Pakistan. The Foreign Office acknowledge the risk, and it is essential that safeguarding professionals understand the risk to women within patriarchal cultures who indicate they may travel to Pakistan. Advice, guidance and support must be made more widely available and safeguards considered prior to travel. Whilst it is not possible to understand if many British women have been killed through honour-based killing currently, due to a lack of data, the existence of the risk should be sufficient to promote greater awareness. One death is too many.

14.13 Aaliyah's lived experience was one of living between two very different cultures resulting in resistance and unhappiness on the one hand, and compliance and trying to keep her family happy, on the other. Ultimately, Aaliyah chose family and travelled to Pakistan at a time when she was very low and presented as being a long way from a perceived culturally ideal wife and Mother. Whilst it is not possible to conclude that agencies could have identified any potential risk for honour-based violence and death in Pakistan for Aaliyah, valuable lessons can be learnt from what we know about her life and circumstances that highlight the very real risks of harm from domestic abuse or honour-based abuse, faced by victims living in a patriarchal culture who are not identified or heard , and who may resist and not fit the norms expected; and understand how restricted their voice may be. It is essential that safeguarding practices acknowledge the risks from honour-based abuse openly and develop practice to understand each unique circumstance to better hear victims and identify and protect potentially hidden victims such as Aaliyah.

15 Lessons Learned

15.1 Lesson 1

Professionals did not demonstrate being 'curious' by asking questions and thereafter seeking or verifying information from alternative sources, as required, to gain an effective understanding of Aaliyahs circumstances and which would have enhanced knowledge of Aaliyah's s lived experience and risk of harm from abuse.

15.2 Lesson 2

The relationship between Children's Social Care and Aaliyah failed her. Conscious bias prevented them looking widely at Aaliyah's unique situation to understand her lived experience and cultural perspective and instead focused on the impact of her substance use without helping her to address the root causes that may assist her to be a better parent, which in turn, may reduce her need for substances. A more successful relationship with FDAC and Change, Grow, Live resulted in Aaliyah reaching her goals to stop drinking and an end to police callouts. Sadly, this was too late for Aaliyah, and she did not get to be with her child.

15.3 Lesson 3

West Midlands Police did not effectively identify and manage Aaliyah as a victim of on-going domestic abuse. They did not identify disclosures of coercive and controlling behaviour, strangulation or Sauron's possession of indecent images of Aaliyah as basic elements of an abusive relationship. They did not record the first disclosure of abuse which impacted on on-going risk assessments. They did not identify a high risk of harm from strangulation which also impacted on further risk assessments. They did not consider support to Aaliyah by consideration of a DVPN.

15.4 Lesson 4:

Opportunities to refer Aaliyah to a MARAC were missed by the police through inaccurate risk assessments that did not fully take cognisance of the features of domestic abuse faced by Aaliyah nor consider risk recorded in previous incidents.

15.5 Lesson 5

Children's Social Care did not challenge the narrative that Aaliyah was equally to blame for abuse in her marriage to Sauron leading to bias against her and missed an early opportunity to identify her as a victim of domestic abuse.

15.6 Lesson 6

Safeguarding training to front line practitioners must include an understanding of counter allegations within their context and why victims may resort to retaliatory

violence, to ensure all victims of domestic abuse are appropriately identified and offered services that can reduce their risk from on-going harm.

15.7 Lesson 7

There were barriers to engagement for Aaliyah through a lack of being believed, a lack of understanding of her needs through poor professional curiosity and a focus on core tasks other than Aaliyah's needs. Covid restrictions also impacted on services for Aaliyah.

15.8 Lesson 8

A poor relationship and a lack of understanding of Aaliyah's lived experience by Children's Social Care impacted directly on Aaliyah and added to her poor mental health preventing timely interventions with specialist substance agencies. Change, Grow, Live and FDAC did support and work effectively with Aaliyah to which she responded and demonstrated abstinence from alcohol and a cessation of police reports. However, it was too late for Aaliyah to demonstrate competency to parent, and she was not able to prevent a court order to place her child away from her resulting in a relapse to substance use and a further mental health crisis.

15.9 Lesson 9

Aaliyah was at risk of honour-based abuse due to the particular risk features of her situation. However, she was not seen through a cultural lens by key agencies who focused on the presenting situation as relevant to their key priorities without considering the existence of risk from honour-based abuse she faced. In consequence, Aaliyah's risk was not identified.

15.10 Lesson 10

The current legal definition of honour-based violence does not reflect the reality for those at risk from wider honour-based abuse and prevents honour-based incidents being recognised, reported, recorded and managed as a crime. It prevents victims identifying their situation and seeking support from specialist organisations.

15.11 Lesson 11

Women in Pakistan are at risk of honour-based violence and killings today. Family honour is a key feature of cultural belief and women within a patriarchal system have reduced rights than in the UK. A lack of data prevents an understanding of how prevalent this issue may be for British women who travel

to Pakistan. Public awareness needs to be raised to highlight the risks women such as Aaliyah may face when under pressure to travel to Pakistan. Local safeguarding agencies need to understand the risks and encompass them within practice. Support services about where help and guidance may be found need to be known about in Coventry.

15.12 Lesson 12

Whilst it cannot be established that Aaliyah died subject to a domestic homicide, it is not right that families are left not knowing where to go for help to understand how a death abroad occurred, or to have to make many formal complaints to be heard. There needs to be the development of guidance for families and an agreed standard for when the British Police should consider investigation.

16 Recommendations

16.1 Recommendation 1

Agencies must evidence to Coventry Community Safety Partnership that that they are prompting and encouraging their professionals to be professionally curious, and Coventry Community Safety Partnership must gain an improved understanding of how to support agencies with this elementary practice.

16.2 Recommendation 2

The Coventry Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should ensure their partner agencies review and revise domestic abuse training to ensure it encompasses an understanding of the elements of forms of domestic abuse and an understanding of victim context where there are counter allegations to ensure victims of domestic abuse are properly identified.

16.3 Recommendation 3

The Home Office should take cognisance of the issues raised in this report that identify the need for a wider legal definition for incidents that are honour-based to identify such incidents as a crime to enhance victim safety and wider public awareness necessary to enhance reporting.

16.4 Recommendation 4

The Coventry Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board should reassure themselves that their partner agencies safeguarding policy and procedures encompass an understanding of honour-based abuse and the implications for victims within wider safeguarding investigations to identify, support and reduce risk to victims of honour-based abuse. Also, to enhance identification of women

at potential risk of honour-based violence who come into contact with services, ensure a routine risk assessment and advice is considered, supported by the development of guidance for victims that provide an understanding of where they may go for options and support, especially if they are known to be travelling out of the UK.

16.5 Recommendation 5

The Home Office should take cognisance of the findings of this review and consider a national campaign to raise awareness of the risks to women from Honour-based violence and abuse when travelling outside of the UK and which promotes where advice and support may be found.

16.7 Recommendation 6

Coventry Community Safety Partnership should disseminate this Overview Report to the Coventry Safeguarding Adult's Board and Coventry Safeguarding Children's Board for them to take cognisance of the learning and incorporate into policy and procedure where relevant.

Appendix 1 Single-agency Recommendations

1. University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust to remind staff of the need to be professionally curious and undertake routine enquiry in relation to domestic abuse.

2. Children's Social Care to review referral processes to ensure victims are not deemed to be perpetrators.

3. Children's Social Care to enhance reflective supervision through a culturally competent lens to consider honour-based abuse.

4. Children's Social Care to consider where dual diagnosis may be a feature and consider holistic support with partners.

5. Mental Health Services and Children's Social Care to enhance information sharing between them.

6. West Midlands Police to ensure DARA risk assessments include historical and relevant known information, including context where counter-allegations have been made to enhance effectiveness and identify risk to domestic abuse victims.

7. Change, Grow, Live to enhance professional curiosity to consider cultural risk and a potential for honour-based abuse, and to better support their client and family members.

8. Change, Grow, Live to review use of their MDT (multi-disciplinary team), to maximise opportunities to call a MDT meeting to enhance risk identification.

9. Change, Grow, Live to review and enhance information sharing with Primary Care.

Appendix 2 ACTION PLAN