



North Worcestershire  
**Community Safety Partnership**

# Domestic Homicide Review

under section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004

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In respect of the homicide of Farshida<sup>1</sup>  
In March 2020

Report produced for North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership by  
Paula Harding  
Independent Chair and Author

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<sup>1</sup> pseudonym

## **PREFACE**

Members of the review panel offer their deepest sympathy to the bereaved family and all who have been affected by the homicide of Farshida (pseudonym).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1. This review concerns the circumstances leading to the killing of a 28-year-old woman and mother of two, Farshida (pseudonym), in Worcestershire in March 2020. Farshida's 44-year-old husband, Nabil (pseudonym), was found guilty of her murder.

### 1.2. Aim and purpose of a domestic homicide review

- 1.2.1. Domestic homicide reviews came into force in April 2011 having been established on a statutory basis under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). The Act states that a domestic homicide review should be a review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by (a) a person to whom they were related or with whom they were or had been in an intimate personal relationship or (b) member of the same household as herself; with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.

- 1.2.2. The purpose of a domestic homicide review is to:

- “a. establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims;*
- b. identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result;*
- c. apply these lessons to service responses including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures as appropriate;*
- d. prevent domestic violence and homicide and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims and their children by developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity;*
- e. contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse; and*
- f. highlight good practice”* (Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance 2016, para 7)

- 1.2.3 As well as examining agency responses, statutory guidance requires reviews to be professionally curious and find the “trail of abuse”. The narrative of each review should “articulate the life through the eyes of [the victim]... situating the review in

the home, family and community of... [the victim] ... and exploring everything with an open mind” (Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance 2016, paras 8 and 9).

### 1.3 Definitions

1.3.1 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced a legal definition of domestic abusive behaviour as consisting of a single incident or course of conduct between two people who are personally connected, each aged 16 or over, and involving any of the following:

- (a) physical or sexual abuse
- (b) violent or threatening behaviour
- (c) controlling or coercive behaviour
- (d) economic abuse
- (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse (s1: Domestic Abuse Act 2021)<sup>2</sup>

1.3.2 Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse if the child sees, hears, or experiences the effects of the abuse, and is related to, or falls under “parental responsibility” of, the victim and/or perpetrator of the domestic abuse. A child might therefore be considered a victim of domestic abuse under the 2021 Act where one parent is abusing another parent, or where a parent is abusing, or being abused by, a partner or relative (para 128, Statutory Guidance 2022)

1.3.3 What constitutes controlling or coercive behaviour is outlined in statutory guidance under section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015:

*“Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.*

*Coercive behaviour is 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.”* (Home Office, 2015:3)

1.3.4 So-called ‘honour’- based abuse is defined as:

*“...a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the perceived honour of the family and/or community, or in response to*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/part/1/enacted>

*individuals trying to break away from constraining ‘norms’ of behaviour that their family or community is trying to impose.” (Home Office, 2022b:42)<sup>3</sup>*

1.3.5 Indicators of domestic abuse can be found, but are not limited to, the following:

- Health indicators of domestic abuse as provided by the National Institute for Clinical Evidence (NICE) Quality Standards (NICE,2016)
- Economic indicators of domestic abuse as provided by Surviving Economic Abuse;<sup>4</sup>
- General indicators of domestic abuse as provided by Women’s Aid Federation England <sup>5</sup>

#### **1.4 Timescales**

1.4.1 The homicide occurred in March 2020 and the decision to undertake a review was made by the Chair of North Worcestershire Safer Communities Partnership in consultation with affected agencies on 26.05.2020. The Home Office was notified of the decision on 16.11.2020.

1.4.2 An Independent Chair and Author for the review was appointed in August 2020 and the first panel meeting was held in November 2020. Thereafter the review experienced a number of delays initially arising from criminal proceedings, and latterly, whilst due consideration was given to contact with the children of the family, which is reflected upon further in the report. The Independent Chair wrote to the Home Office to advise them of these circumstances.

1.4.3 Nonetheless, the panel met three times. All panel meetings were minuted and all actions agreed for the panel have been tracked and completed.

1.4.4 The panel considered and agreed the draft Overview Report on 26.05.2023 before it was endorsed by the Community Safety Partnership on 06.09.2023. It was submitted to the Home Office, whose Quality Assurance Panel endorsed the report on 28.04.24.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to emphasise that there is no honour in abuse and that is why the term ‘so-called ‘honour’-based abuse’ is often used.

<sup>4</sup> <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/what-is-economic-abuse/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/recognising-domestic-abuse/>

## **1.5 Confidentiality**

- 1.5.1 This Overview Report has been anonymised in accordance with statutory guidance. In order to protect the identity of the victim and her family, a pseudonym was chosen for the victim and her husband and advice sought on its suitability.
- 1.5.2 Whilst the details of each review remain confidential, the report has sought to extract sufficient detail from the family's narrative for the lessons and recommendations to be understood, whilst balancing this need for confidentiality.

## **2 Terms of Reference**

### **2.1. Methodology**

- 2.1.1. The review followed the methodology required by the *Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews* (HM Government, 2016a).
- 2.1.2. 16 local agencies were notified of the homicide and were asked to examine their records to establish if they had provided any services to the family and to secure records if there had been any involvement. None of the agencies involved had contact with the family that was relevant to this review.
- 2.1.3. West Mercia Police provided the findings from the criminal investigation and provided details of the family who were to be invited to engage with the review.
- 2.1.4. The terms of reference for the review were drawn up by the Independent Chair together with the panel.
- 2.1.5. The Independent Chair authored the Overview Report, and each draft was discussed and endorsed by the review panel before submission to the Community Safety Partnership.

### **2.2. Involvement of family and friends**

- 2.2.1. Aside from her children, the victim had no family living in the UK and she was not known to have any close friends. However, she maintained regular contact with her parents and her sister in Afghanistan.
- 2.2.2. The victim's family were notified about the review in writing by the Independent Chair of the review. All communications were translated into Farsi and the Police Family Liaison Officer, who had come to know the family well, introduced the domestic homicide review to them, with the help of a translator. However, the family did not respond to requests to engage and were deemed to have declined.

- 2.2.3. The panel gave due consideration to engagement with the three children in the household, whose ages ranged between 7 and 11 years at the time of the homicide. Children are now legally recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right when they witness one parent being abused by another (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021), yet they are rarely invited to take part in domestic homicide reviews (Stanley et al., 2019). The panel recognised that children often have vital information to share with reviews and their involvement, depending upon their age and circumstances, can be healing and empowering for children and young people bereaved through homicide.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.2.4. The Independent Chair took advice from the team around each of the children including their social workers, social work managers and Independent Reviewing Officers. They in turn consulted with the children's foster family. The Independent Chair met with the team at periodic intervals over an eight-month period in order to monitor the progress and well-being of each of the children. However, as the months progressed, it became clear that the trauma each of the children had experienced meant that they would not be ready to engage with the review in the foreseeable future.
- 2.2.5. The Independent Chair will continue to liaise with Worcestershire Children First until the review is finally endorsed by the Home Office in case circumstances changed during this time. In the meantime, leaflets for children explaining domestic homicide reviews, which were produced by Advocacy After Domestic Abuse (AAFDA), were shared with the children's social workers<sup>7</sup>.

**Recommendation 1: Children's Records**

North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to recommend to Worcestershire Children First that the final report of this review is attached to each of the children's social care records. This is so that, if they wish to read the report of the domestic homicide review when they are older, it will be available to them.

**2.3. Involvement of perpetrator and family**

- 2.3.1. The Independent Chair wrote to Nabil in prison, with letters translated into Farsi, but he did not respond and was deemed to have declined to be involved.

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion on involving children in domestic homicide reviews see the short film commissioned by Advocacy After fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) and Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse in which Joanne Sharpen discusses the involvement of children in domestic homicide reviews. Available at: <https://aafda.org.uk/public/resources/involving-children-in-domestic-homicide-reviews>

<sup>7</sup> Available at [https://aafda.org.uk/public/storage/Resource%20Items/Children%20in%20DHRs/Resource\\_for\\_professionals.pdf](https://aafda.org.uk/public/storage/Resource%20Items/Children%20in%20DHRs/Resource_for_professionals.pdf)



- 2.3.2. Nabil had no family living in the UK other than his brothers who were themselves convicted of concealing his crime.

## **2.4. Independent chair and author**

- 2.4.1. The Independent Chair and Author is Paula Harding. She has over thirty years' experience of working in domestic abuse with both senior local authority management and specialist domestic abuse sector experience. For more than ten of those years she was the local authority strategic and commissioning lead for domestic abuse and violence against women for a large metropolitan area and has been an independent chair and author of domestic homicide and safeguarding adult reviews since 2016. She completed an M.A. (Birmingham) in Equalities and Social Policy in 1997, focusing on domestic abuse and social welfare, and is a regular contributor to conferences, national consultations and academic research.
- 2.4.2. Paula Harding completed the OCR certificated training funded by the Home Office for *Independent Chairs of Domestic Homicide Reviews* in 2013. She has also completed the on-line training provided by the Home Office, *Conducting a Homicide Review*,<sup>8</sup> and has undertaken training on the Significant Incident Learning Process, Learning Disability Mortality Reviews and training with Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse.
- 2.4.3. Beyond domestic homicide reviews, Paula Harding is wholly independent of the local area, having no other connection with any agencies in Worcestershire.

## **2.5. Members of the review panel**

- 2.4.1 Multi-agency membership of this review panel consisted of senior managers and designated professionals from the key statutory agencies, and all were independent of the case.
- 2.4.2 Wider matters of diversity and vulnerability were considered when agreeing panel membership. West Mercia Women's Aid provided a local domestic abuse service and therefore brought particular expertise on domestic abuse and the 'victim's perspective' to the panel. Consideration was given to identifying an organisation with specific expertise in supporting Afghan women experiencing domestic abuse, to sit on the panel but as there was no relevant agency involvement in this regard, it was not considered necessary on this occasion (see later for impact upon the current Afghan resettlement programme).

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<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conducting-a-domestic-homicide-review-online-learning>

2.4.3 The review panel members were:

Name	Role/Organisation
Paula Harding	Independent Chair
Bev Houghton	Community Safety Manager, Redditch Borough Council & Bromsgrove District Council
Claire King	Safeguarding Services Manager, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust
Diane Harding	Training & Participation Officer, West Mercia Women's Aid
Deborah Narburgh	Head of Safeguarding, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Daniel Gray	Safeguarding Quality Assurance - Group Manager & Principal Social Worker, Worcestershire Children First
Heather Manning	Head of Safeguarding & Designated Nurse - Children, Adults and Children Looked After and MCA Lead, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board
Paul Kinsella	Senior Public Health Practitioner, Worcestershire County Council Public Health
Sarah Cox	Head of Safeguarding, Worcestershire County Council Adult Social Care
Stephen Cook	Detective Inspector, West Mercia Police

2.5. Time period and key lines of enquiry

- 2.5.1. The panel agreed that the review should focus on the contact that agencies had with the victim, her husband and the three children of the household, during the period from 2015, when Farshida was pregnant and gave birth to her youngest child, until her homicide in March 2020. Information about earlier times was included for contextual information only.

2.6. Contact with agencies

- 2.6.1 Summaries of agency contact were provided by the following agencies but none of their contact was considered relevant to the review. No disclosures of domestic abuse within the family were made to any agency and no presentations were indicators of domestic abuse<sup>9</sup>.

- Heart of Worcestershire College
- Hereford & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (school nursing)
- NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

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<sup>9</sup> See below for sources of guidance regarding indicators of abuse

- Walsall Children's Services
- Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust
- West Mercia Police (provided contextual information for the period prior to this marriage, held by Police Scotland)
- West Midlands Police
- Schools (First and Middle)

2.3.1 The following agencies were contacted but confirmed that the family were not known to them prior to the homicide:

- Cranstoun (domestic abuse and drug alcohol services)
- The Probation Service
- Swanswell (former drug and alcohol service)
- West Mercia Women's Aid (domestic abuse service)
- West Midlands Ambulance Service
- Worcestershire County Council Adult Social Care
- Worcestershire Children First

## **2.4 Parallel reviews**

2.9.1 Beyond criminal proceedings, the review was aware of no other parallel reviews being undertaken.

## **2.10. Equality and diversity**

2.10.1 The review gave due consideration to each of the nine protected characteristics under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010<sup>10</sup>, as well as to wider matters of vulnerability for the family.

2.10.2 Domestic abuse and domestic homicide are considered to be, most often, gendered crimes (Stark, 2007). Analysis of all the domestic homicide reviews published by the 322 community safety partnerships in England and Wales between 2011 and 2020, being the year that Farshida was killed, 86 per cent of homicide victims were women (Chopra et al, 2022). The significance of violence against women should, therefore, always be considered within a domestic homicide review.

2.10.3 In addition, at the outset of the review, the review sought to question whether the protected characteristics of marriage, pregnancy /maternity, race, religion and belief may also be relevant in this case.

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<sup>10</sup> The nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation

- 2.10.4 “The review noted the 14 year age difference between Farshida and her husband and that this may have compounded the power that her husband had within the relationship by virtue of his cultural position as head of the household and his past experience as a perpetrator of domestic abuse within his former marriage.
- 2.10.5 The Review applied an intersectional framework in order to understand the lived experiences of both victim and perpetrator, in so far as they were able. This means to think of each characteristic of an individual as inextricably linked with all of the other characteristics in order to fully understand an individual’s journey and experience with local services and within their community.

## **2.11 Dissemination**

- 2.11.1 The following individuals and organisations will receive copies of this review:

- Farshida’s family (translated version)
- The Governor of the prison where the perpetrator is held
- North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership and its agencies
- Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Strategic Board
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

## **3. THE HOMICIDE**

- 3.1 Nabil killed his wife, Farshida in March 2020 and then enlisted the support of his two brothers in conceal his crime. One of his brothers helped him to bury Farshida’s body in a makeshift grave in remote woodland. Thereafter, Nabil fabricated text messages from Farshida’s phone claiming that she had left him before reporting her missing to the police three days later. He explained to the police that she had taken her money and passports and was leaving the country and not coming home. The police proceeded to treat her as a missing person before escalating their concerns to a murder investigation shortly afterwards having found her personal belongings suspiciously still in the family home.
- 3.2 When Farshida’s body was found over six months later, wrapped in bin bags and a duvet, her body was too badly decomposed for a post-mortem to determine a cause of death. The body had not been located on the initial search but, following a review of the evidence, the site was revisited, and the body located.

- 3.3 During the trial, Nabil professed his innocence insisting that Farshida was still alive, and that the body found was not hers. He was found guilty of murder and given a life sentence with a minimum of 18 years imprisonment. Both brothers also received terms of imprisonment for their roles in concealing the murder.
- 3.4 In sentencing, Judge Mr Justice Hilliard said that Nabil's lack of remorse, his concealment of the body and his pretences afterwards that she was still alive, made him believe that he intended to kill his wife.

## **4. CHRONOLOGY**

### ***Background to the relationship***

- 4.1 Farshida was born and raised in Afghanistan. She was a bright and aspirational student and had been accepted to college with high grades.
- 4.1.1 Nabil was also born and raised in Afghanistan. In 2002, when he was aged 24, he fled the country alongside his brothers, each of whom were being targeted by the Taliban, and they sought asylum in the UK. Nabil initially lived in Scotland, got married and had a child before divorcing when the child was aged two. During the marriage, Nabil was abusive to his first wife and the abuse was reported to Police Scotland on three occasions, but he was never charged with any offence.
- 4.1.2 In 2011, after Nabil's divorce from his first wife, he entered into an arranged marriage with his sister's friend, Farshida. She was aged 19 and lived in the same hometown in Afghanistan as Nabil, who was aged 34 at the time of this marriage.
- 4.1.3 Farshida gave birth to the first of her two children in 2013 and, with the child, she joined Nabil in the UK in the following year. Shortly afterwards, Farshida's immigration status became settled with her being granted 'indefinite leave to remain' in the UK.
- 4.1.4 Although Farshida did not attend mosque, Nabil worshipped at Birmingham Central Mosque.

### ***Moving to the West Midlands***

- 4.1.5 The family moved a couple of times and for short periods, with Nabil's work, before settling in the West Midlands. Their second child was born in 2015 in a Walsall hospital and the birth was without complications, although records from this time did not detail whether routine enquiry was undertaken in domestic abuse.

- 4.1.6 Nabil's child from his first marriage came to live with the family in 2015 as the child's mother was unable to care for the child.

### ***Moving to Worcestershire***

- 4.1.7 The family moved to Worcestershire<sup>11</sup> in 2017 and the couple began a pizza take-away business and became homeowners.
- 4.1.8 In terms of services, they received routine health services and the younger children received universal health visiting services before attending school. There were no disclosures of domestic abuse made, nor indicators of domestic abuse present, in any of the family's routine contact with agencies and the three children attended school without concerns.

### ***Starting College***

- 4.1.9 Farshida enrolled at the Heart of Worcestershire College in September 2019 and attended for two days per week to study English as a Second Language. She spoke Farsi and her use of English was still limited at this stage and her husband spoke for her when she enrolled. He was seen to be domineering and derogatory about his wife on this occasion. Farshida was observed by teachers to be quiet and studious, but she became more confident as her studies continued. During her attendances, Farshida did not make any disclosures of domestic abuse either directly to the college or to other students. She last attended college three weeks before she was reported missing.

## **5. THEMES**

### **5.1 Experience of Domestic Abuse**

- 5.1.1 Although no agency was aware of domestic abuse in the household, and no indicators of domestic abuse had been brought to their attention, the criminal investigation after Farshida's death revealed some of her experiences of domestic abuse.

### ***Physical Violence and Threats***

- 5.1.2 Farshida had disclosed to her family in Afghanistan that her husband threatened to kill her every day. He was physically violent towards her, slapping her on occasions and pulling her hair to such an extent that she had it cut short, to try to prevent this

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<sup>11</sup> Location redacted

abuse (Judge's Sentencing Remarks). She told them that she had had to lock herself in the bathroom to evade his abuse.

- 5.1.3 During their investigation, the police uncovered that a customer of the pizza establishment had noticed, on one occasion, that Farshida had a black eye but when she was asked about it, Farshida said that it had been accidental. However, some members of her family had also noticed her having black eyes at times during their video calls with each other and when questioned, her husband would answer for her.
- 5.1.4 Farshida's family told the police who were investigating her murder, that Farshida's sadness and suffering was obvious during their contact with her, but she would nevertheless tell them that everything was fine and invested her energies and attention in the care of the children.
- 5.1.5 From such a distance, this was undoubtedly very difficult for the victim's family to deal with. However, even when closer, it was noted that families and friends and members of the public often do not know what to do when they suspect that someone is experiencing domestic abuse.

**Learning Point: Guidance for family and friends**

It is difficult for family, friends and members of the public to know what to do when they suspect domestic abuse is happening, particularly if the victim minimises or denies their experiences when asked.

Research has shown that family and friends are often fearful of asking personal questions about abuse: worrying about making the situation worse; worried about acting on just a suspicion; not knowing who to contact; fearful of what might happen to the victim (CAB, 2015)<sup>12</sup>

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<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Crime%20and%20Justice%20Publications/Linkinthechain.pdf>

**Recommendation 2: Supporting Family & Friends to Respond to Domestic Abuse**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to develop and promote local guidance for family, friends and members of the public on how to respond safely to domestic abuse and direct to sources of support.<sup>13</sup>

The Board to monitor the success of its guidance and promotion is successful and reaching across the communities in ways such as monitoring increased demand for advice from domestic abuse services from family and friends.

- 5.1.6 It was noted that this recommendation was consistent with the learning that was emerging from another domestic homicide review that was happening at the same time.

***Minimising the abuse***

- 5.1.7 It is not unusual for victims to minimise their abuse when speaking to others. In Farshida's case there was also a context to how much she said. When investigating the homicide, the police perceived a degree of acceptance and tolerance of some degree of domestic abuse within marriage which is explored below.

***Stalking***

- 5.1.8 Farshida told her family that her husband often followed her, and she went on to film him on her mobile phone whilst he was doing so.
- 5.1.9 Stalking in an intimate relationship is often an indicator that a perpetrator is monitoring every movement of the victim at home or in other spaces and these surveillance and tracking tactics form part of the behavioural repertoire of people who abuse through coercive control (Stark, 2009). Although at least some of Nabil's stalking was visible to Farshida, stalking is often hidden, unpredictable, and persistent in nature and carries an implied menace which can lead to a state of hyper vigilance in victims trying to keep themselves safe (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017; Mullen et al., 2018). A thematic review of 263 domestic homicide reviews

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<sup>13</sup> Various guidance exists from which local communications could be drawn to support the development of local guidance such as: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs#support-a-friend-if-theyre-being-abused>  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Crime%20and%20Justice%20Publications/Linkinthechain.pdf>  
<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/the-survivors-handbook/im-worried-about-someone-else/>  
<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Friends%20and%20family%20blog%20covid-19.pdf>



found that stalking was one of three highest predictors of homicide in intimate relationships yet significantly under-reported (Chopra, 2022).

**Learning Point: Stalking**

Evidence has revealed that stalking behaviour usually involves a perpetrator's fixation and obsession and should always be taken seriously by professionals. In research on domestic homicides, stalking behaviours were present in 94% of the homicides (Monckton-Smith et al., 2017:12).

**Recommendation 3: Stalking**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to raise both agency and public awareness about the nature and risks of stalking behaviours in domestic abuse and the help that is available through specialist domestic abuse services and through the police.<sup>14</sup>

The Board to monitor the success of its promotion including whether it was effective in reaching across its communities in ways such as:

- increasing numbers of calls to the National Stalking Helpline<sup>15</sup> and West Mercia Women's Aid<sup>16</sup>
- increasing reports of stalking and increasing use of Stalking Protection Orders by West Mercia Police

***Repeat and Serial Perpetrators***

- 5.1.10 Although the police did not receive any reports of the Nabil's domestic abuse within this relationship. If they had, Nabil's history of domestic abuse in his previous relationship would have been significant information for the risk assessment that would have been undertaken. A history of domestic abuse is not surprisingly a common characteristic of perpetrators of domestic homicide (Chopra, 2022; Websdale, 2000; VKKP, 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> current advice can be found at <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/safeguarding-and-concerns-about-adult/domestic-abuse-support/domestic-abuse-stalking/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Pages/Category/national-stalking-helpline>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/help-support/i-need-help/>

## **5.2 Barriers to support and protection**

- 5.2.1 The fact that no agency was made aware of the domestic abuse that Farshida was experiencing, drove the review panel to consider what barriers she may have faced in identifying her experiences as abuse and what barriers she may have faced in seeking help and protection for the abuse for herself and the children in the family. The review therefore firstly considered attitudes to domestic abuse and violence against women in the couple's country of origin.

### ***Religious and Cultural Traditions of Afghanistan***

- 5.2.2 Afghanistan is a highly patriarchal society that adheres to rigid codes of so-called 'honour' and these are widely perceived to be a central feature of family life in Afghan society. Whilst 'honour' can have several meanings, at its core it is closely connected to the control of women and girls and to gendered social norms of behaviour (Home Office, 2022b). Women in Afghanistan have traditionally faced a highly subordinated position, having the status of legal minors and been expected to maintain the family and bear children (CEDAW, 2013). As a result, there remains a high prevalence in the country of domestic abuse, rape, forced marriage, as well as punishment and retaliation for women who breach cultural norms and traditions, including women's role in maintaining family unity. (ibid). The punishment for transgressing cultural norms and expectations, which includes divorce, can range from ostracism to extreme violence and so-called 'honour' killings which are prevalent in Afghan society.
- 5.2.3 Although both Farshida and her husband were brought up in Afghanistan and both still had close ties with their families, the extent to which each family adhered to so-called 'honour' and 'shame' was not known to the review. However, it might be anticipated that these views pervaded family life and provided the first of many barriers to safety that Farshida faced.
- 5.2.4 Whilst considering the influence of culture, it should be noted that domestic abuse and violence against women is a universal phenomenon and that the UK and Afghanistan both experience relatively high levels of violence against women. Nonetheless, it is important for service providers and policy makers to consider cultural values, norms and beliefs in order, at least, to ensure that services can be effective in meeting needs and breaking down any barriers that may exist (Kouta et al., 2018).

***Isolation & Wider Barriers***

- 5.2.5 Domestic abuse remains chronically under-reported. The current Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy (2022-25) estimated that in the year that Farshida was killed, 43% of domestic abuse victims in Worcestershire did not report to the police. Nevertheless, the rate of under-reporting and help-seeking varies from community to community and will be influenced by a range of cultural dimensions including shame and so-called ‘honour’; gender roles and expectations; fears of racism that they may encounter from agencies; language barriers; isolation and the lack of understanding of the services available to name but a few (Chantler et al, 2022).
- 5.2.6 Beyond going to college, Farshida was particularly isolated and had no family or close friends in the country. She was relatively new to the country; her command of English, before attending college, was limited and she lacked community networks. Indeed, Worcestershire has comparatively far less diversity in the ethnicity of its populations than the West Midlands region or England as a whole, and until recently, had no identifiable Afghan community.<sup>17</sup>
- 5.2.7 It is not known in this case whether Nabil maintained or contributed to her isolation. However, it is well researched that those seeking to control their partners will often isolate them from family and from services in order to, “...prevent disclosure, instil dependency, monopolise their resources and express exclusive ownership” (Stark, 2007:262). It was noteworthy that Farshida’s confidence at college was beginning to grow as her studies of English progressed. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to escalate their domestic abuse in order to maintain their control when their partner becomes more independent.<sup>18</sup>
- 5.2.8 Moreover, it did not appear that Farshida had been exposed to the complex social support systems in the UK and therefore may well not have appreciated that there were services, housing and welfare benefits available to her should she flee her abuser with her children. In Afghanistan women have had limited recourse to the law or services to protect them from domestic abuse and so-called ‘honour’ killings were rarely investigated by the police (United Nations, 2018).
- 5.2.9 When Farshida was first granted her ‘indefinite leave to remain’ in the UK, she would not initially have been able to claim welfare benefits in her own right and would have been economically dependent upon her husband who had sponsored her. It is not known whether she knew that this restriction would have been

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<sup>17</sup> [https://data.worcestershire.gov.uk/population/#/view-report/0c56f92984864bd79ad565629a13c41e/\\_\\_\\_iaFirstFeature](https://data.worcestershire.gov.uk/population/#/view-report/0c56f92984864bd79ad565629a13c41e/___iaFirstFeature)

<sup>18</sup> This is particularly evidenced when this independence progresses to plans to separate from the abuser (Chopra, 2022)

automatically lifted after five years and she may have still felt economically dependent upon her husband. It is not uncommon for abusers to exploit this economic dependency.

- 5.2.10 In more recent times, Worcestershire has been actively involved in the resettlement of Afghan refugees and this resettlement programme has embraced the learning from this review particularly with regard to the need to ensure that female refugees are aware of the law and options around domestic abuse.

**Learning Point: Awareness of Rights, Help and Support for Newly Arriving Victims of Domestic Abuse**

It is unlikely that victims of domestic abuse who are new to the UK will be aware of the help and support that is available for them or know about their rights and entitlements. Local areas should ensure that information is available in a range of community languages in places that newly arriving communities may frequent, particularly in universal services.

- 5.2.11 Farshida was killed by her husband five days after the first lockdown under the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions. Responding to concerns about domestic abuse and homicide rates during the pandemic, the police and government in England and Wales established the Domestic Homicide Project<sup>19</sup> to collect, review, and share quick time learning on all domestic homicides that occurred (Bates et al., 2021). This research found that there was a higher proportion of domestic homicide victims from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (24%) during that first year of the pandemic than during the previous 15 years(ibid).

**Learning Point:** The Covid-19 pandemic increased the isolation and risk for ALL domestic abuse victims but Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) faced additional barriers and were at increased risk of domestic homicide.

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<sup>19</sup> Within the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme which is a partnership between the Home Office, National Police Chiefs Council and the College of Policy

**Recommendation 4: Enabling Access to Help and Support for Minoritised Women Experiencing Domestic Abuse**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to promote awareness of the help and support available for minoritised women experiencing domestic abuse, utilising its well-established community engagement infrastructure, such as that used to tackle hate crime, as well as in a broad range of community languages. The Board to monitor the effectiveness of its promotion by measuring increased access to the help and support provided by the police and domestic abuse agencies from minoritised groups of women experiencing domestic abuse.

**5.3 Role of Further Education**

- 5.3.1 Farshida's only access to awareness and services would have been through services such as primary care, maternity services and the Heart of Worcestershire College, where she had been learning to speak English for the six months prior to her death. Farshida's tutor had no formal concerns for her, recognising her to be quiet and studious and quite private about her family. It was to the College's credit that her tutors observed how Farshida's confidence was seen to be increasing as her command of English grew.
- 5.3.2 Universal services, including schools and colleges play a vital role in being able to reach victims of domestic abuse, both adults and children, particularly those who are isolated from other services by virtue of being marginalised in the wider community and Further Education Colleges are no exception. The Heart of Worcestershire College readily committed to provide the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board with assurance concerning its approach to domestic abuse in respect of both the information provided for students and how domestic abuse featured within its safeguarding policies. However, the panel identified other providers of further education and English as a Second Language in their area, including the County Council and recognised the benefit of connecting each of these providers into best practice responses, specialist services and the multi-agency response to domestic abuse

**Recommendation 5: Promoting Awareness of Domestic Abuse for those Learning English as a Second Language**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to promote best practice in raising awareness of domestic abuse and the help that is available with providers of English as a Second Language courses within their area and ensure that they are connected into specialist domestic abuse services.

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board should seek evidence from further and higher education establishments in their area on how they raise awareness of domestic abuse and the support that is available with all students, including those studying English as a Second Language.

- 5.3.3 The Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (2022) identifies the important role that schools, colleges and universities have in the prevention, early identification and response to domestic abuse. However, whilst guidance is available for the former and the latter<sup>20</sup>, there is not specific guidance for further education or adult education settings which provide the main source of learning opportunities for adults who are newly arrived in the UK or learning English. A future refresh of the statutory guidance would benefit from this inclusion as their role is vital in reaching hidden, isolated or marginalised communities.

**Recommendation 6: Best Practice in the Further Education Response to Domestic Abuse**

The Home Office is asked to consider in future iterations of the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance, including guidance specifically for further and adult education colleges and settings, which provide learning opportunities and support for marginalised communities of adult students studying English as a Second Language.

## 5.4 Children's Experiences of Domestic Abuse

- 5.4.1 After Nabil's eldest child joined the family, having been unable to stay with the child's mother due to neglect and other factors, no safeguarding concerns were identified for the children. No agency was aware that the children were being exposed to domestic abuse at home and were therefore victims of domestic abuse in their own right.
- 5.4.2 Whilst much consideration went into whether the review should seek to engage the children, and there were very good reasons not to do so in this instance, the review nonetheless was alert to the barriers that children often face in seeking help when they are living with domestic abuse.

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<sup>20</sup> See particularly for universities

<https://clou.uclan.ac.uk/37526/1/Domestic%20Abuse%20Policy%20Guidance%20for%20UK%20Universities%202021.pdf>

**Learning Point: Barriers for children & young people in disclosing domestic abuse**

A recent Children's Commissioner committed to hearing directly from children about these barriers and found that children's reluctance to talk to professionals, was often from fear of getting their family into trouble, being taken into care, or getting in trouble themselves with family

*"When children did tell professionals or other adults, it often rebounded on them, damaging relationships at home. Parents or siblings could get very angry and upset and blame the child for any of the consequences. This could be traumatic and isolating. These accounts emphasise not only the devastating impact that domestic abuse...can have, but also the process of making a disclosure to a professional or adult. It is important to remember this, particularly within a system where the burden in terms of identifying children and young people living in these households lies on a child or young people making disclosures."* (Children's Commissioner, 2018)

- 5.4.3 Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (2022) recognises the unique position of schools in being able to identify concerns early and to help children and young people to understand healthy relationships through the compulsory delivery of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE). The review heard the response to domestic abuse was also embedded in Worcestershire schools through their safeguarding duties<sup>21</sup> and through Operation Encompass which operates across the County, enabling children to be supported in schools directly following a report to the police of domestic abuse in the household.
- 5.4.4 Despite these initiatives to create safe and supportive environments for children to be able to disclose abuse, the children in this family did not appear to feel able to talk to any professional about what was happening at home. Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises how children living with parental domestic abuse are victims of domestic abuse, irrespective of how they witness the abuse. Whilst children exposed to domestic abuse are also more likely to be directly physically abused or neglected themselves, domestic abuse has a profound impact upon the well-being of a child (Home Office, 2022b:52). All children respond differently to living with domestic abuse, but it is not uncommon for them to experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, hypervigilance, difficulty sleeping, inconsistent regulation of emotions, internalising their distress, becoming withdrawn, self-harm or aggression. They will often have to be managing their space within the home, so they are not visible (Home Office, 2022b:53). We do not know how Farshida's three children responded to the domestic abuse that they were experiencing but know that they held their response as well as the domestic abuse as a secret outside of the family.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

- 5.4.5 This review highlights the need to create safe environments for children to be able to disclose domestic abuse to a trusted adult. By necessity, identifying children and young people experiencing domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity involves delivering clear messages to them about safety and domestic abuse at each age and stage of their development in ways which traverse cultural underpinnings of violence against women.

**Recommendation 7: Enabling Children's Disclosure of Domestic Abuse**

In order to enable children and young people to disclose domestic abuse and seek help at the earliest opportunity, Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board should use this review to highlight with schools the need to continue to create safe environments and provide clear messaging on healthy relationships at each age and stage of a child's development, and in ways which address cultural underpinnings of violence against women.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- 6.1 Whilst no agency was aware of the domestic abuse that Farshida experienced before she was brutally killed by her husband, North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership and Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board have been asked to reflect upon how they can reach more marginalised populations and increase disclosures and reporting of domestic abuse by adults and children alike.
- 6.2 Following completion of this report, the Home Office commented that reviews of this nature could be strengthened through the inclusion of a specialist organisation who could speak to the experience of Afghan women.

**Recommendation 8: Enabling the Experience of Minoritised Victims to be Heard in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews.** North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to ensure that the voice of domestic abuse victims from minoritised communities is made available to subsequent Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews, where applicable, through either representation of specialist agency on the panel or for review of the draft Overview Report before finalisation



## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Recommendation 1: Children's Records

North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to recommend to Worcestershire Children First that the final report of this review is attached to each of the children's social care records. This is so that, if they wish to read the report of the domestic homicide review when they are older, it will be available to them.

### 7.2 Recommendation 2: Supporting Family & Friends to Respond to Domestic Abuse

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to develop and promote local guidance for family, friends and members of the public on how to respond safely to domestic abuse and direct to sources of support.<sup>22</sup>

The Board to monitor the success of its guidance and promotion is successful and reaching across the communities in ways such as monitoring increased demand for advice from domestic abuse services from family and friends.

### 7.3 Recommendation 3: Stalking

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to raise both agency and public awareness about the nature and risks of stalking behaviours in domestic abuse and the help that is available through specialist domestic abuse services and through the police.<sup>23</sup>

The Board to monitor the success of its promotion including whether it was effective in reaching across its communities in ways such as:

- increasing numbers of calls to the National Stalking Helpline<sup>24</sup> and West Mercia Women's Aid<sup>25</sup>
- increasing reports of stalking and increasing use of Stalking Protection Orders by West Mercia Police

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<sup>22</sup> Various guidance exists from which local communications could be drawn to support the development of local guidance such as: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs/domestic-abuse-recognise-the-signs#support-a-friend-if-theyre-being-abused>  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Crime%20and%20Justice%20Publications/Linkinthechain.pdf>  
<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/the-survivors-handbook/im-worried-about-someone-else/>  
<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Friends%20and%20family%20blog%20covid-19.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> current advice can be found at <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/safeguarding-and-concerns-about-adult/domestic-abuse-support/domestic-abuse-stalking/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Pages/Category/national-stalking-helpline>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.westmerciawomensaid.org/help-support/i-need-help/>

**7.4 Recommendation 4: Enabling Access to Help and Support for Minoritised Women Experiencing Domestic Abuse**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to promote awareness of the help and support available for minoritised women experiencing domestic abuse, utilising its well-established community engagement infrastructure, such as that used to tackle hate crime, as well as in a broad range of community languages. The Board to monitor the effectiveness of its promotion by measuring increased access to the help and support provided by the police and domestic abuse agencies from minoritised groups of women experiencing domestic abuse.

**7.5 Recommendation 5: Promoting Awareness of Domestic Abuse for those Learning English as a Second Language**

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to promote best practice in raising awareness of domestic abuse and the help that is available with providers of English as a Second Language courses within their area and ensure that they are connected into specialist domestic abuse services.

Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board should seek evidence from further and higher education establishments in their area on how they raise awareness of domestic abuse and the support that is available with all students, including those studying English as a Second Language.

**7.6 Recommendation 6: Best Practice in the Further Education Response to Domestic Abuse**

The Home Office is asked to consider in future iterations of the Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance, including guidance specifically for further and adult education colleges and settings, which provide learning opportunities and support for marginalised communities of adult students studying English as a Second Language.

**7.7 Recommendation 7: Enabling Children's Disclosure of Domestic Abuse**

In order to enable children and young people to disclose domestic abuse and seek help at the earliest opportunity, Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board should use this review to highlight with schools the need to continue to create safe environments and provide clear messaging on healthy relationships at each age and stage of a child's development, and in ways which address cultural underpinnings of violence against women.

**7.8 Recommendation 8: Enabling the Experience of Minoritised Victims to be Heard in Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews**

North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to ensure that the voice of domestic abuse victims from minoritised communities is made available to subsequent Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews<sup>26</sup>, where applicable, through

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<sup>26</sup> The government announced the change in title from Domestic Homicide Reviews to Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fatal-domestic->

either representation of specialist agency on the panel or for review of the draft Overview Report before finalisation

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