



**Fenland Community Safety Partnership
(FCSP)**

Domestic Homicide Review - Irena

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) was commissioned by the Fenland Community Safety Partnership following the murder of Irena in April 2017.

An ambulance was called to a multi- occupancy address on the report of a female having collapsed.

Ambulance staff found the body of Irena and established that she had been dead for several hours. There were other persons at the address including the partner of Irena, the perpetrator.

A subsequent investigation revealed that Irena had died as a result of a significant trauma to her abdomen.

The perpetrator was arrested and charged with the murder of Irena. He stood trial and was found guilty of the offence of murder of Irena. He was sentenced to 17 ½ years' imprisonment.

Contributors to the review

- Cambridgeshire Police
- General Practitioner
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- Housing
- Fenland Council

Panel members

Name	Agency
Jon Chapman	Independent Chair & Author
Russell Wate	Support to chair ¹
Claire Bruin	Cambridgeshire County Council (Adult Social Care)
Vickie Crompton	Cambridgeshire County Council (Partnership manager Domestic Abuse /Substance misuse)
Claire Cooper	Refuge (Domestic Abuse Specialist & voluntary sector)
Selina Ashman	SSS Foundation Trust (DA/ Alcohol Specialist)
Sarah Gove	Fenland District Council (Housing)

¹ The support to chair is independent of all agencies, has not been employed by any local agencies for over 8 years. He played no part in the reviewing aspect but organise all panel meetings.

Aaron Locks	Fenland Community Safety Partnership
Nina Burton	Circle Housing

Terms of Reference

The following terms of reference was adopted by the panel.

The purpose of this Domestic Homicide Review is to:

- 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;
- 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;
- Apply these lessons to service responses including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures as appropriate;
- 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;

The further specific areas that this review sought to address are:

- To what extent was the misuse of alcohol an issue in this DHR?
- Were there any cultural issues that impacted on this DHR?
- Was the victim isolated; if so was it an issue?
- Did the perpetrator misuse steroids if so did it impact on this DHR?

Summary chronology

Irena was a Lithuanian national who moved to the UK in September 2013. The perpetrator of this offence was known to the Irena before she moved to the UK from Lithuania and it was he who encouraged her to move to the UK.

Irena lived in rented accommodation until she experienced difficulties with rent arrears, more recently she had relied on accommodation provided by acquaintances.

She was employed through agencies in relatively low paid work but in 2014 she was diagnosed with a serious illness which required ongoing treatment.

Irena maintained contact with her family in Lithuania and would occasionally return there to spend time with them. During one of these visits she visited a doctor for anxiety and was

found to have two 'recently' broken ribs

Both the Irena and perpetrator abused alcohol on a regular basis. Irena had, shortly before her death, stated an intention to return to Lithuania to seek treatment for this.

Irena had very few close friends and there is evidence that she was isolated due to being a non-English speaking visitor, her ill health and her reliance on the perpetrator.

What were the factors in this DHR?

Cultural Issues - There is a well-established Lithuanian Community in the Fenland area but there is a tendency for them to reside principally together and not to mix much outside of their own communities. Within the Community there is a recognised cultural mis-trust of authorities. A language barrier exists for many although interpretation services have been introduced by many agencies. Both the victim and perpetrator did not have any social networks outside their own community and neither spoke a basic level of English.

Isolation – Irena had few friends and her ill health impacted on her ability to maintain employment and network with others. She was described as 'meek and mild' and there is evidence that the victim suffered with anxiety and depression. These factors undoubtedly left her feeling alone.

Alcohol abuse – Irena regularly abused alcohol and was described as a heavy drinker. The issue with heavy drinking in the Fenland area, particularly in Eastern European communities is prevalent and initiatives are in place to tackle the culture of street drinking. The criminal trial noted that alcohol abuse was a factor in the life of both Irena and the perpetrator.

Controlling behaviour – Whilst there were no direct disclosures or reports of abuse there were strong indications that Irena was an isolated and vulnerable person who was under the influence of the perpetrator.

Conclusions

This is a case where the death of Irena does appear to have a significant connection with the misuse of alcohol, her isolation and the controlling behaviour on the part of the perpetrator. These vulnerabilities were further amplified by Irena's limited command of English and her lack of close friends, and the ability to find consistent work following the serious illness and a limited income.

These facts combined with a lack of understanding of UK culture, lack of knowledge of the support available from statutory and voluntary agencies, must have created for her a significant feeling of isolation and left her vulnerable.

Recommendation 1:

The FCSP should consider convening with their partners, several practitioners' events across the Fenland area for professionals and agencies using this case to highlight the effect of alcohol and controlling and coercive behaviour. This will also help to gain a clearer picture of how to reach Fenlands diverse migrant communities and other minority groups. This should also include the integration of alcohol abuse awareness with voluntary agencies and the FDC tackling alcohol initiative.

Recommendation 2:

The FCSP should seek assurance that each agency strategic safeguarding leads ensure that front-line staff are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of this specific form of domestic abuse. Where there is, or has been a lack of intervention that practitioners have the confidence to be empowered to escalate their concerns to ensure that referrals are made and that agency opportunities can be addressed by professional strategy discussion.

Recommendation 3:

- (i) The FCSP should seek assurance that health practitioners, through the CCG in their area, are encouraged to ask explicit questions concerning domestic abuse and that signposting to other support agencies by referral is considered on an individual basis as best suits the needs of the individual, e.g. alcohol/drug support.
- (ii) The FCSP should ask the QEH Trust to review their policy to consider asking all patients if there is any domestic abuse as opposed to targeting specific categories of patients as is current practice under trust policy.

Recommendation 4:

The FCSP should look at Integrating agencies such as the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) to the FCSP for 'future proofing' domestic abuse policy within the migrant population. This should be considered to maximise publicity opportunities in the workplaces. The experience of the multi-agency approach to tackling issues involving the exploitation of the migrant community in Operation Pheasant ² may be useful in broadening the approach to intervention opportunities.

Recommendation 5:

The FCSP should seek to ensure that that local housing associations and providers seek to gain Domestic Abuse Accreditation.

² A multi-agency initiative involving Fenland District Council, the Police, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, Gangmaster Licensing Authority (GLA), HM Revenues & Customs (HMRC), Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue.

Recommendation 6:

The FCSP should seek to ensure that Migrant Outreach workers work with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to offer advice, guidance and signposting for domestic abuse.

Recommendation 7:

The FCSP should look at ways to gain voluntary support from within the migrant community in supporting initiatives for tackling domestic abuse to assist in creating opportunities for intervention. They should consider initiating this with a focus group to inform a communication strategy.