



**Transforming
health and social care**
in Kent and Medway

Highlighting the relationship between domestic abuse and suicide

Megan Abbott, Suicide Prevention Project Support Officer, Megan.Abbott@kent.gov.uk

Tim Woodhouse, Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, tim.woodhouse@kent.gov.uk

Iona Hunter-Whitehouse, Senior Development Project Officer, Oasis iona.hunter-whitehouse@oasisdaservice.org

Transforming health and social care in Kent and Medway is a partnership of all the NHS organisations in Kent and Medway, Kent County Council and Medway Council. We are working together to develop and deliver the Sustainability and Transformation Plan for our area.



Welcome and introduction

Tim Woodhouse

- It is a tragic truth that domestic abuse can lead to deaths by suicide of the victim, the perpetrator, and also of children that grow up in abusive households
- We know this because these deaths form the basis of multi-agency and serious case reviews every year (Domestic Homicide Reviews, Child Death Review Panel reports etc)
- Professional curiosity amongst the Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Team led us to consider whether we had a bigger problem in Kent than other parts of the country or when compared to the national average
- However, a literature review (of journals and data sources) found that no one knows how many people die by suicide after having their lives impacted by domestic abuse
- We have undertaken a series of mini research projects to try and understand the scale of the issue, with the ultimate goal of trying to find ways to reduce the risk of unnecessary deaths
- This presentation sets out the findings, and recommendations of the research projects, and highlights the many unanswered questions



Why may experiencing domestic abuse make someone feel suicidal?

Ali is a 45-year-old woman who has always worked in healthcare with older people.

She lives alone in a flat that she has rented since her divorce. Her children are both adults and have moved away from Kent.

She meets Lee in 2016 and Oasis gets the first referral for her a year later.

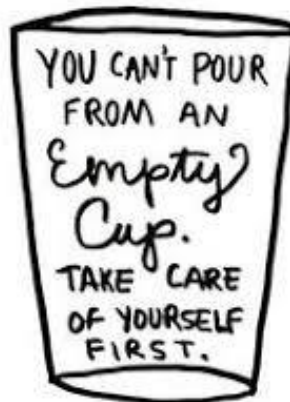


A gentle reminder...

The subject matter we are covering today is sensitive and hearing case studies can be upsetting.

The following support is available:

- The NSPA event today has it's own 'quiet space'
- The Samaritan's helpline 116 123 24hr helpline
- The National Domestic Abuse helpline 0808 2000 247



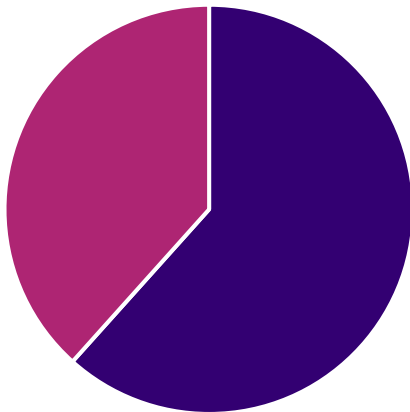
Highlighting the relationship between DA and suicide

Megan Abbott

Research project 1: We wanted to explore levels of suicidality amongst victims and perpetrators

We asked three of the commissioned Domestic Abuse providers in Kent to look through their DASH assessments and provide data on DASH Questions 5 + 22

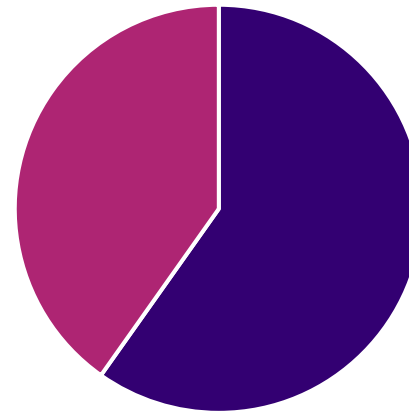
Q5 - Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?



■ Yes ■ No

Out of the sample of 928 clients **63%** were feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts.

Q22 - Has the abuser(s) ever threatened or attempted suicide?



■ Yes ■ No

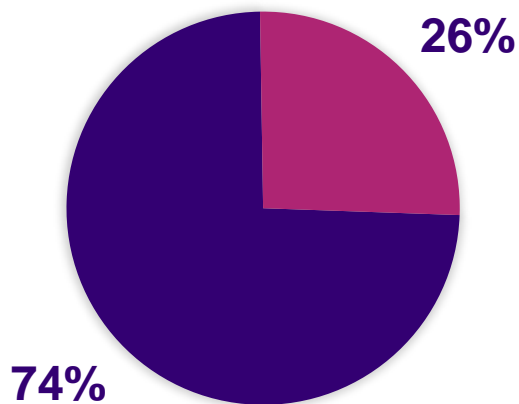
Out of the sample of 928 clients **61%** had an abuser(s) that had threatened or attempted suicide.



Research project 2: We undertook a major analysis of all publicly available Domestic Homicide Reviews from across the country

- Statutory guidance into when a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) should be completed was changed in 2016 to include cases where a victim takes their own life.
- This study reviewed all publicly available DHRs since the 2016 change. A total of 93 DHRs from 44 counties.

OUT OF 93 DHRS



- Of the 93 DHRs reviewed, over a quarter (26%) contained a suicide; either that of the victim or perpetrator (murder/suicide).

- **10** suicides were completed by the victims,

- **13** suicides were completed by the perpetrator, and were classed as murder/suicides.

Speaking to Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (and other experts) it is apparent that many victims and perpetrators die by suicide without DHRs being conducted – so these figures are an underestimate of the total number of deaths involved.



Note: Research conducted during the summer of 2020. Published DHRs were available online for 44 out of 48 counties. DHRs that have been published on local authority websites have been reviewed but it is important to note that some DHRs are not published / most DHRs take many months or even years to be published.

Research project 3: We established that children in households impacted by DA are also dying by suicide

- Suicides amongst children under the age of 18 are rare but tragic.
- A recent thematic review of suicides amongst children in Kent has been undertaken by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board and the University of Kent
- It found that *“adverse childhood experiences related to familial domestic abuse and parental conflict... are present in {some of the deaths by suicide considered by} this study.”*
- Australian Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell in 2017, “Some children feel so distressed by their exposure to family and domestic violence that they exhibit self-harm and suicidal thoughts. In the worst of cases, they become direct victims – they take their own lives.”

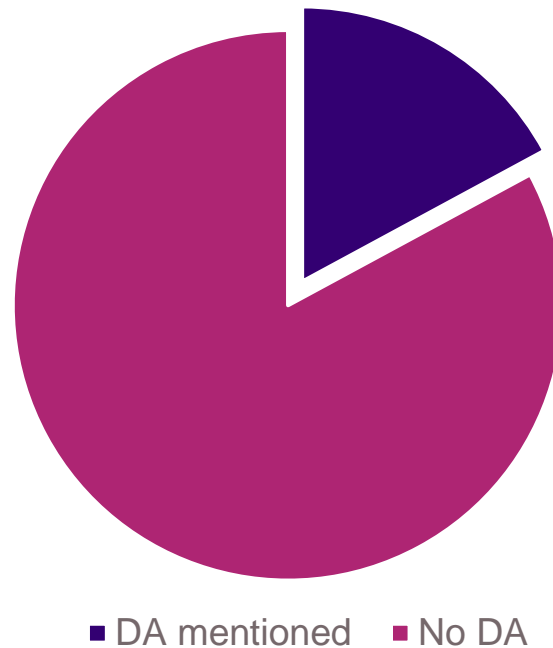
Suicide in Children and Young People
Crossing the Rubicon: From Suicidal Ideations to Suicidal Acts
Kent Safeguarding Children's Board Major Report
May 2020
A Thematic Analysis



Research project 4: Early indications from local Real Time Surveillance

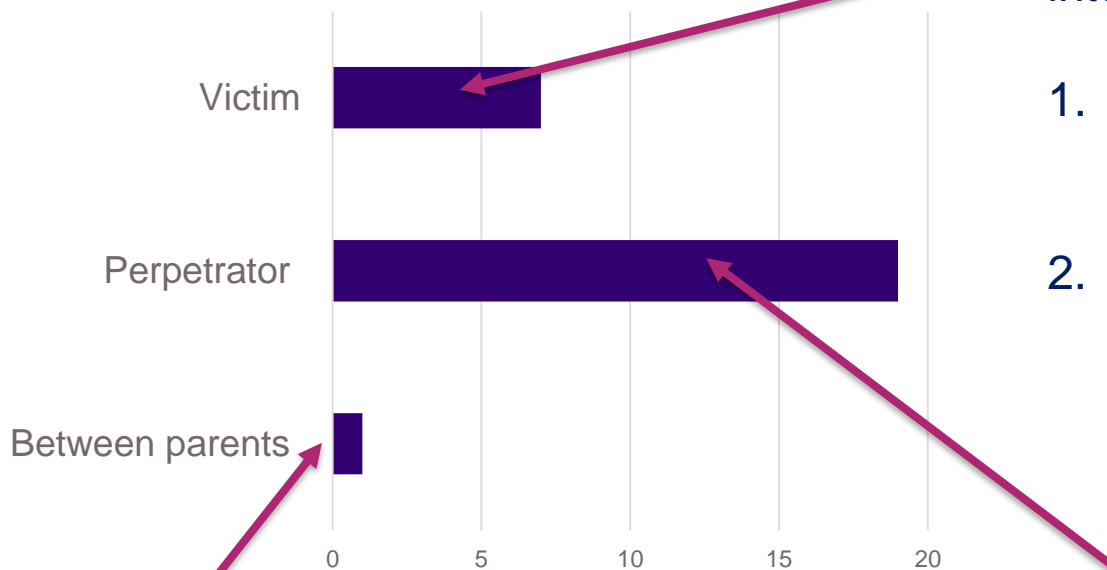
- We have our first full year of real time suicide surveillance data. There are indications that the proportion of domestic abuse related suicide could be even greater than we ever expected.
- In almost **20%** of suicides, domestic abuse was present.

Domestic abuse stated in completed suicides



Research project 4: Early indications from local Real Time Surveillance

Of the domestic abuse cases, the individuals involvement was as follows:



Further analysis of this breakdown is showing that **victims** are split into two cohorts:

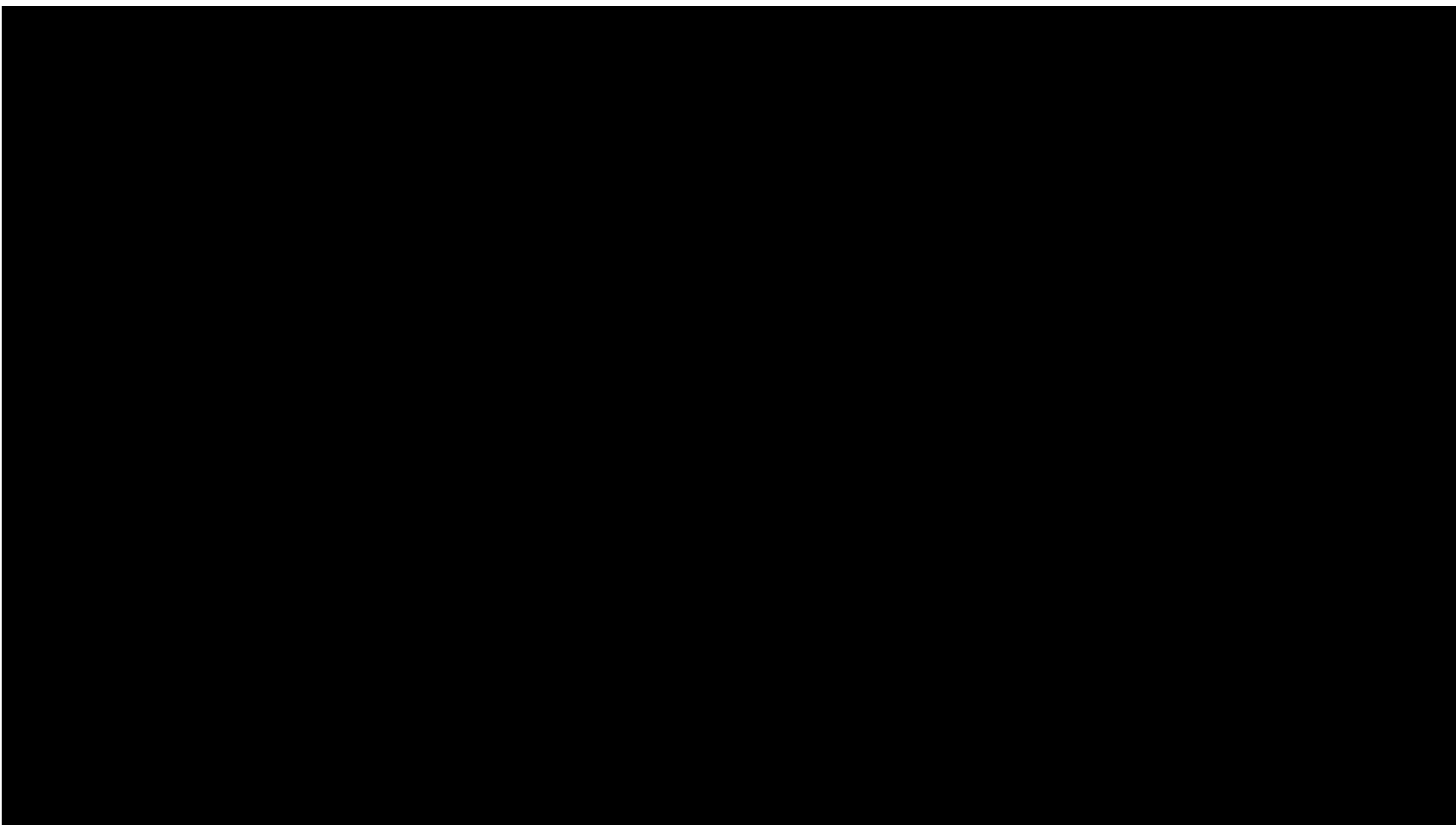
1. Victims that are dying by suicide in the **middle of the abuse**
2. Victims that are dying by suicide **months after the abuse has ended.**

Children and young people living in households impacted by domestic abuse.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse make up the majority of cases; of which the perpetrator has either been **convicted** or is currently **under investigation** for domestic abuse.



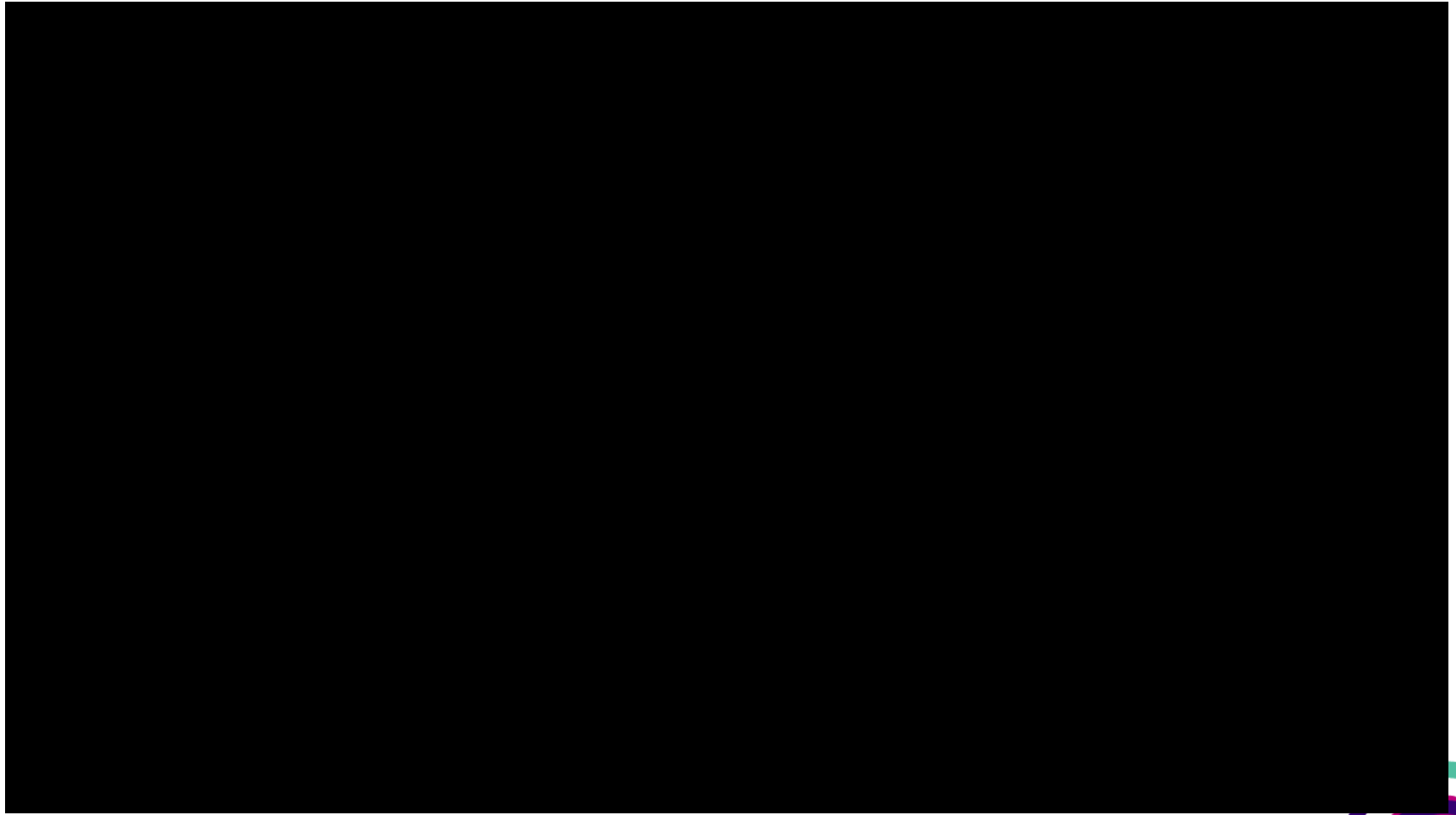
Does the suicide risk for victims extend after the direct abuse ends?



<https://youtu.be/Pn7WEx57R8M>



Is it a surprise that our local Real Time Suicide Surveillance is also highlighting that perpetrators are dying by suicide?



<https://youtu.be/0bvtKF0jUuA>



Discussion

We believe that our research has demonstrated the link between domestic abuse and feeling suicidal.

We also believe we have also demonstrated that lives are being lost by suicide after being impacted by domestic abuse

But so many answers still remain that we can't answer from our local position...



But so many unanswered questions remain...

1. How many victims of domestic abuse die by suicide nationally and locally (both during the abuse, or in the months and years that follow)?
 - Are any groups at higher risk (gender? LGBTQ+? Age?)
 - Are there any high risk points within the abuse cycle?
 - Eg when a victim is informed the perp is being released from custody?
 - Or by suicide after the abuse has stopped
2. How many perpetrators of domestic abuse die by suicide nationally?
3. How many children living in households impacted by domestic abuse are dying by suicide nationally?
4. What interventions could reduce the risk of deaths by suicide?



What can local areas do?

Tim Woodhouse

- 1 Mental health and suicide prevention training completed by all domestic abuse staff. (This is becoming a commissioning condition).
- 2 Domestic abuse training completed by all mental health staff. (Looking to make this a commissioning condition where possible).
- 3 Specialist domestic abuse counsellors to be made available for all MARAC victims
- 4 Ensure provision of recovery (including trauma aware elements) programmes for female and male victims of domestic abuse in the months and years after the abuse has stopped
- 5 Ensure provision of perpetrator programmes for both men and women
- 6 Undertake further research
 - Qualitative research with victims
 - Detailed analysis of RTSS
 - Detailed analysis of data held by secondary MH trust



- The Suicide Prevention Programme funded Oasis, to pilot their 'Understanding trauma' programme for DA Survivors
- The psychoeducational groupwork programme helps individuals understand how brains react to trauma. The ultimate objective is to offer participants practical self-care advice and coping mechanisms
- The programme consists of six workshops (each two hours long) and works with 10 survivors of domestic abuse at a time
- A two-day training course is being developed to train other practitioners to deliver this groupwork.
- By engaging other professionals this trauma knowledge will be shared and the content can be delivered across Kent and Medway in many contexts and settings.

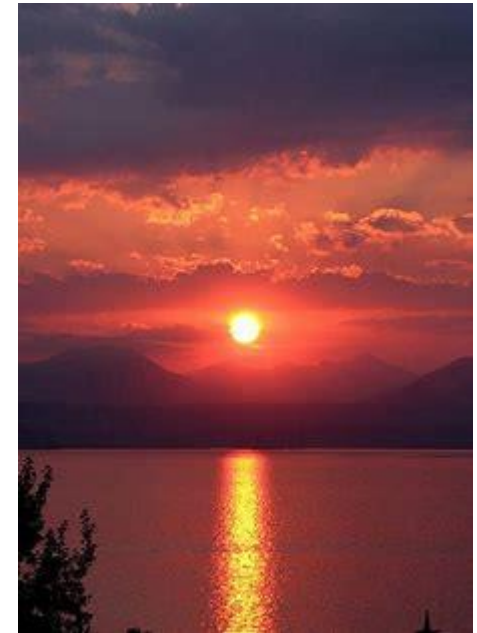


“Understanding Trauma” case study



We asked Oasis how the group is helping “Alison” who survived many years of abuse.

Iona explained that the group helps “by celebrating the fact that she has survived and by helping her learn new tools to deal with the trauma she experienced for many years. It helps her to understand her reactions and feel more in control. It helps her take on hard days in a different way, making them less bad and less often.”



Q&As and open discussion

