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Menara Ahmed

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Co-ordinator

VAWG and Hate Crime Team

Directorate of Health, Adults and Community

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

 9 June 2021

Dear Menara,

Thank you for submitting the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) report (Salma) for Tower Hamlets Community Safety Partnership to the Home Office. Due to the COVID-19 situation the Quality Assurance (QA) Panel was unable to meet as scheduled on 28th April therefore the report was assessed by a virtual process. For the virtual Panel, members provided their comments by email, the Home Office secretariat summarised the feedback and the Panel agreed the feedback.

The QA Panel felt the DHR is overall a well written and sympathetic report that is clear and well researched. The voice of the victim feels present, and this is in part due to the involvement of Salma’s niece in the review, and the witness statements shared by Salma’s nephew and cousin/sister-in-law. The dedication at the beginning of the report, chosen by Salma’s niece, shows a high level of respect for the family and their wishes. Similarly, the eldest child of Salma and Omar was also involved via their social worker, and the perpetrator was approached but declined to take part. The family asked the Chair to choose pseudonyms, which they then approved. The report is very comprehensive and detailed on family circumstances, events and interactions with services and includes the views of the family. The report paints a portrait of Salma as someone with ‘high hopes’ for her children and is one which the children, when older, might find helpful to read.

The report is appropriately probing and pulls out good learning from the circumstances. For example, there is good discussion around the use of family members as translators and the downgrading of risk. There is also good consideration around the care of the children, including a recommendation that the review be attached to the children’s social care records so they can read when they are older, if they wish to. The key findings and action plans are clearly outlined, with missed opportunities being identified. The report indicates that the review was conducted with a commitment to openness and meaningful learning. It highlights important lessons for schools and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; it places a clear focus on the context and possible cause of Child A’s behaviour to determine the most appropriate intervention. The equality and diversity section also shows very appropriate considerations.

The Panel features cultural representation, which is commended. It is also good practice that the lead from the neighbouring CSP, Gamcare and London Muslim Centre were invited to offer expert advice and act as critical friends. The Chair ensured the DHR panel was tailored to the specific circumstances of the case, strengthening the review. The citing of research also makes the DHR a useful resource for further learning and the footnotes throughout are useful.

The QA Panel felt that there are some aspects of the report which may benefit from further revision, but the Home Office is content that on completion of these changes, the DHR may be published.

**Areas for development:**

* The report is repetitive at times which could be addressed to shorten the review and make it more accessible to the reader.
* The name of the children’s school at 1.6.5 needs to be removed.
* It is unclear if the Victim Support Homicide Service provided advocacy to the family with this DHR.
* 1.8.3 appears to be incomplete.
* More could be done in the report to address the cultural environment in which the victim lived and the cultural issues that could have impacted her ability to ask for help. The victim was not able to work or be financially independent; the victim was often dependent on family for housing, there is no exploration of the family dynamics such as whether there were any barriers to her seeking help for fear of stigma or shame. There is no investigation of why appropriate support was not offered from a specialist service supporting women from this community or the clear need for there to be a better understanding of what domestic abuse and sexual violence looks like and the barriers to reporting it in this community (which includes being sent to mainstream services that do not understand the context).
* The review highlights that family, and extended family who were able to contribute had concerns about the relationship, and Child A is also able to describe this. There is a question about why they were unable to do more to help or seek advice. It is not clear what information was given to family members at various points, in what language and what understanding of the right support or interventions there may have been. Often, community led organisations are where marginalised communities turn for help and advice. There is no exploration of this, just a statement to say that the review could not find anyone else from the community to contribute.
* The report would benefit from a more comprehensive overview of how the panel reached the conclusion that ‘honour-based’ abuse was not relevant to Salma and Omar’s experiences, including the murder itself. It is surprising that ‘honour-based’ violence was not considered and that mention of the panel considering whether it was possibly relevant was relegated to a foot note.
* The action plan is not outcome focused, failing to identify some fundamental issues and hence needs to be addressed.
* The recommendations for schools could have included the introduction of specialist training on the impact of domestic abuse on children and helpful intervention based on a trauma informed approach. Noting that Operation Encompass has now started, it would have been good for the school to include what has changed since the murder.

Once completed the Home Office would be grateful if you could provide us with a digital copy of the revised final version of the report with all finalised attachments and appendices and the weblink to the site where the report will be published. Please ensure this letter is published alongside the report.

Please send the digital copy and weblink to DHREnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. This is for our own records for future analysis to go towards highlighting best practice and to inform public policy.

On behalf of the QA Panel, I would like to thank you, the report chair and author, and other colleagues for the considerable work that you have put into this review.

Yours sincerely,

**Lynne Abrams**

Chair of the Home Office DHR Quality Assurance Panel