

HARMFUL PRACTICE CASE STUDIES: SPOTLIGHTING NUANCES AND PRACTICE POINTS

Co Action Hub



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MARIA

MARIA* has been referred to MARAC by the police following an incident where her husband assaulted her in their home. Maria has not made a statement to the police and declined to complete a risk assessment. The police referred to MARAC under the category of potential escalation as this is the 4th time they have been called out to the address this year.

Maria was referred to an IDVA who shared in the meeting that she was assessed as medium risk using the DASH RIC. They provided safety planning and advice. Maria told the IDVA that she comes from a devout Christian family, and her faith is important to her. She disclosed that she is separated from her husband, but still living in the same house as she has nowhere to go. She has a new partner and has recently found out that she is pregnant by him. Her husband is not aware of this, but she is worried what will happen once her pregnancy is more visible. She also disclosed that family are very unhappy that she has separated from her husband and are pressurising her to resume the relationship, including threatening her. It is unclear whether she was referring to her family, his family or both, and it is unknown where they currently reside. Maria hasn't answered her phone the last few times the IDVA has tried to contact her.

An action is set for the IDVA to further explore the risks from Maria's* family and offer a referral to a specialist by and for organisation. However, they are unable to make contact with her again. The police case does not proceed due to insufficient evidence.

Several weeks later Maria attends a women's centre run by a local ending VAWG by and for organisation for advice on her housing situation. During the risk and needs assessment, she discloses that she is scared of her brother. He is close to their church leader, and she believes that they are turning the community against her.

* The asterisk indicates anonymization of the name to maintain confidentiality of information and identity of the person

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She also stated that her husband has been using texts from the Bible to shame her and prove to her that she is 'worthless'. In the past he has sexually assaulted her, telling her that it is her duty to have sex with him as she is his wife.

The by and for agency has identified spiritual abuse and a risk of 'honour' based abuse and assessed her as high risk based on their professional judgement. They are very concerned that the risk from the partner, the brother and the wider community will escalate, particularly once the pregnancy becomes known. The agency has advised her on her options and will be providing ongoing support. They have referred the case back to MARAC but have been informed that as nothing 'new' has happened the case would not be heard again.

PRACTICE POINTS

- Professionals should consider a wide range of harmful practices when risk assessing.
- Agencies should apply the 'one chance' rule and attempt to risk assess and safety plan as much as possible when engaged with a survivor of harmful practices. The DASH RIC is unlikely to ascertain the extent of the risk in harmful practices cases, and additional questions are needed.
- Agencies should attempt to find out who the perpetrators are prior to MARAC in order to inform risk management.
- A repeat referral to MARAC does not require a new 'incident' and can be based on potential escalation of risk.
- Information which indicates a potential escalation in risk requires a new risk reduction plan.