

Sam - Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) December 2023

Background: What happened and why?

This is a mandatory SAR about a 51-year-old male, Sam who died in June 2022. Sam was white British, and had the sole tenancy of a flat provided by the local authority in an area with significant deprivation. Sam's flat is believed to have been used by close associates of people engaged in anti-social and criminal activity (Cuckooing). Sam had become socially withdrawn, depressed, had poor health and had developed an alcohol dependency over several years. He was at risk from self-neglect and from exploitation. Health professionals tried to encourage Sam to accept health care. Housing and police worked to address concerns about Sam's welfare which included how anti-social behaviour could be stopped. However, there was little focus on the reasons that lay behind the struggles that Sam was facing, and very little known about his life history and past trauma. It is only through the SAR process and conversations with family that this past trauma became known.

Key Issues Identified: What did we learn?

- A person-centred, relationship-based approach remains central to establishing trust, appreciating the reasons behind self-neglect, exploring perspectives and preferred options.
- The powerful influences that may affect behaviour such as childhood or adult trauma, addiction, shame about environment and circumstances, grief about increasing disability, and fear of loss of control, are often not recorded and therefore not considered.
- The fact that so little was known about Sam by any of the services is an important lesson. The safeguarding challenge is to address the cause of self-neglect (what is the person's story and what has happened to them). Understanding trauma and how it affects a person is the key. Relying on legal enforcement has limited utility in these circumstances.
- If cuckooing is seen as a person making the wrong choices (about allowing people into their home for example) it leads to people thinking the strategy is to give them clear words of advice backed up by threats of legal sanctions which will be largely ineffectual and exacerbate what is already a complex situation.

Outcomes: What needs to happen next?

Although a person may retain the mental capacity and have the right to make unwise decisions the duty of care still requires professionals to explore why unwise decisions are being made and what can be done to help a person who is self-neglecting and reluctant to engage with support; it requires developing a relationship.

A Mental Capacity Assessment should include the impact of trauma on executive brain function.

Those who work with adults at risk of abuse and neglect, including self-neglect, should familiarise themselves with the [Multi Agency Self-Neglect Policy and Practice Guidance \(Including Vulnerable Adult Risk Management \(VARM\) and Complex Case Management \(CCM\)\)](#).

Exercise professional curiosity particularly in cases where someone is unable to or reluctant to access services and/or they are self-neglecting. [Watch our short video on professional curiosity.](#)