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Background

Dobash and Dobash in 1979 stated "...for most people and especially for women and children, the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong". McLeod in 2018 added "...coercive control is a key feature of abusive relationships".

Whilst coercion/control is written about extensively within the context of domestic abuse, instrumental violence/control and coercion are key factors within a range of offending behaviours. These may initially appear to be external to the home environment, often families feel obligated for a range of reasons to collude and not report even when exposed to extreme behaviours. This may be due to fear of reprisal action which may harm them/their family; monetary gain from offending; knowledge of offending and fear they may face charges, and more. There may also be threats of harm, intimidation or other abuse used to frighten or punish which is used to control the family.

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What should I do?

Consider the impact of family criminality through a safeguarding lens. What's the child's lived experience? How is this impacting on their health, learning and development?

Provide the opportunity to be heard. Be pro-active in engaging the child(ren)

Consider the impact of potential Coercion when families are not engaging with professionals. use your own and others professional curiosity

What can we do differently?

Speaking to children if there has been a serious and provide some time and safe space that they can engage with someone they trust

Awareness of links between OCG perpetrators and risks including violent personality traits and how these may play out in the family home

Be aware that just because someone is in Prison, this does not provide full Safeguarding (can still phone and have Contact; visits are not fully supervised; Thus opportunities to coerce families Remain – check if family members are in contact, consider control measures if necessary to protect

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Child KT

KT was 17 years old when he was assaulted with a machete by his step-father.

Prior to September 2016, the family were not known to agencies outside of universal services. The step-father was assaulted in front of this family with a machete whilst on temporary release from prison. None of the family, including the step-father, provided statements to the Police allowing for an active investigation following this incident. The family then failed to co-operate during the investigation of the s18 wounding matter against KT, despite this having been witnessed by his eldest half-sibling.

There was an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) in anticipation of step-father's release from prison in May 2017, the outcome of which was Child in Need, it being felt that the family were engaged and that there was no evidence of any ongoing likelihood of reprisal assaults.

The case closed to Children's Social Care in July 2017.

Following KT being assaulted a strategy meeting took place. As the step-father had been recalled to prison, the case was closed, no safeguarding concerns were identified as ongoing.

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Safeguarding considerations?

Step-dad had a lengthy history of violent offending and involvement in organised drug supply.

'children of criminal parents are more likely to become criminals themselves' (Farrington, Coid, & Murray, 2009; Thornberry, 2005). What is the impact of organised crime on families?

Step-father was known in the community as someone to be afraid of. How much emphasis is given to such intelligence? If someone can instill such fear in others, why is it perceived that this level of coercive control does not exist within the home?

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Compliance vs engagement – The family did engage with professionals in the lead upto to the ICPC, however emphasis was given as to this as opposed to any significant questions being asked about why the family had failed to co-operate with any police enquiries.

Compliance doesn't alone equate to change and did the focus on compliance prevent greater professional curiosity as to why the family didn't speak about the incident to anyone

Prison – does not equal safety. In this instance mum still went to visit dad and made threats to daughter should she co-operate with police.

No consideration was given to fact that risk remains irrespective of someone being in custody.

Risk of reprisal – how much do we think about risk to family when planning for release of someone who may be a target?



What do people experiencing coercion want?

Proactive empathetic professionals

Asking about abuse, supporting people to recognise it

Quality time and the opportunity to talk

Acceptance and understanding/no blame

Recognition of risks / prioritising safety

Contact with others, friendship and mutual support

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