

Case Study

Sarah Wood – RASA Merseyside



Case Study

DA Strategy Workshop



2024 RASA Merseyside received a referral from Merseyside Police for Jess (pseudonym) who had experienced sexual violence with her ex-husband and in childhood

Jess had been heard at MARAC in January and again in March 2024

Demographics

- Female
- Age 35-40 years
- White British
- Heterosexual
- Autistic
- Separated
- Has child/ren
- Employed
- Private rent accommodation



MARAC

- On/off 18yr relationship ended 2022
- History of sexual abuse within relationship, harassment, stalking, controlling and coercive behaviour, threats to kill
- Non-molestation order in place from 2023 to 2024
- Breached non-molestation order numerous times
- Had been to refuge on 2 x occasions during this time

Sexual Violence

Thought it was something she had to do as part of being in the relationship

She “went along with it” to prove that she wasn’t having an affair

She “didn’t make a sound” because she didn’t want to upset/frighten the children

She said “he didn’t pin me down and he wasn’t violent, so it wasn’t rape”

Wasn’t sure what was and wasn’t SV

Had a history of SV

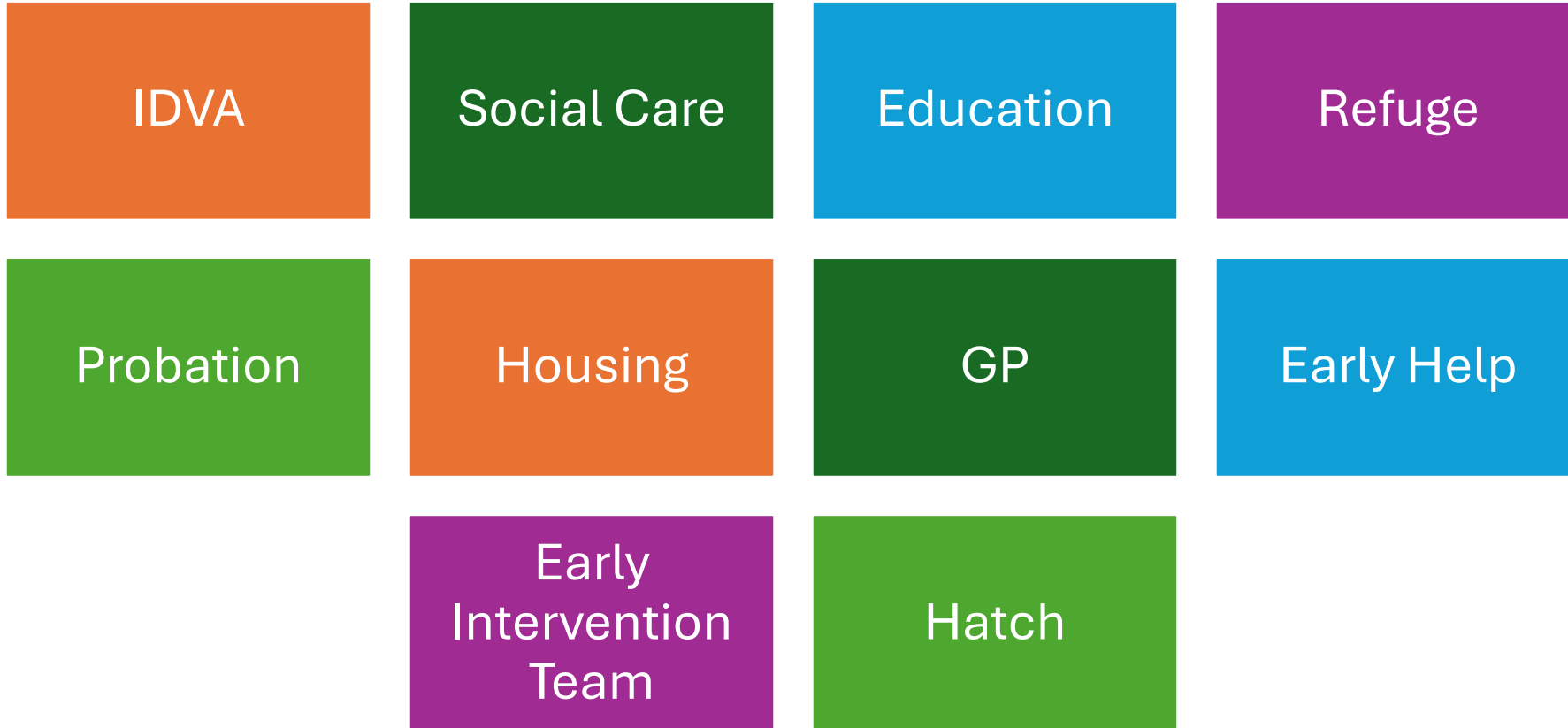
Sexual Violence within Domestic Abuse

Rape is often an indicator that domestic violence could escalate to homicide. Numerous studies have identified this, including the influential paper *Death by Intimacy: Risk Factors for Domestic Violence* (Johnson, Lutz and Websdale, 2000) in which the authors state that in a number of cases, prior to femicide, “usually within a month or so of the killing, there was a twist in the victimisation pattern, for example, marital rape”.

Laura Richards is a former violence adviser to the UK Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers and an expert on fatal domestic abuse. She explains that there is always a pattern of abuse which often includes rape prior to femicide. “Rape [when committed by domestic violence perpetrators] is often a high-risk factor to serious harm and femicide,” she says.

“Some of the men used horrific sexual violence as a way to punish women, often for leaving them,” explains feminist activist Liz Kelly who was involved in a small group of women’s aid activists who were campaigning to focus more attention on the sexual violence element within domestic violence cases that ended up in refuges.

Services Involved



Initial Assessment

- I started supporting Jess in May 2024
- No CSC involvement at this stage but had had support in the past
- Ex-husband now released but had been to prison regarding stalking
- Felt she had a robust safety plan due to support from IDVA
- Had a Victim Liaison Officer and they would support her until August 2024 when his sentence was due to end
- Restraining Order in place
- No current contact between her ex-husband and children
- Said she wouldn't hesitate to call the police if there were any further incidents
- History of SV with others which began in childhood

Impact of Domestic Abuse

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Chronic fear
- Low self-esteem
- Negative self-image
- Shame
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Prescribed medication
- Hypervigilance
- PTSD


Initial Beliefs



It was my fault




I'm selfish




I should have
left earlier



I'm ugly



I'm a bad
mum



I didn't protect
the children



Bonding over shared trauma

Trauma Bond - 7 Stages

1

Love bombing

2

Trust and
Dependence

3

Criticism and
Devaluation

4

Manipulation and
Gaslighting

5

Resignation and
Giving Up

6

Loss of Self

7

Emotional
Addiction to the
Trauma Bond
Cycle



Forward and backward steps

EMDR



Started EMDR (Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) and engaged very well with the process



Installed some positive beliefs



Moved house with support from Housing



But then ...

Update

- In August she contacted me to advise she could not attend her session because she had received bad news and needed to support her children
- I thanked her for letting me know and advised I would book her in for the same time the following week
- She then replied and said she doesn't know when she'll be available because the police had just contacted her to advise her husband had been found dead and she was logged as his next of kin

Support resumed

- The next month she got in touch to say she wanted to return and resumed her sessions the following month
- Started by processing how she felt about her ex-husband's death

External Influences

- Found it hard to not be influenced by others
- She found it helpful to know that her feelings were **all** valid:
- It was understandable that she felt angry with him
- It was understandable that she had feared him
- It was understandable that she had cared about him
- It was understandable that she missed him
- It was understandable that she loved him

Beliefs installed through EMDR

I'm
okay
now

I'm
stronger
now

I am a
good
mum

I can
cope

I can give
myself
compassion

I am
good
enough

I am
believed

I am
happier
now

Only the abuser
is responsible
for the abuse

I deserve
to be
happy

I am
worthy of
love

How do we support victim/survivors?



VALIDATION



EDUCATION



LIBERATION

Impact of Multi-Agency Approach



Every service involved was instrumental in Jess's recovery from the domestic abuse.



She described feeling seen, heard and believed.



Refuge gave her and her children the respite that she needed. They were able to offer her empathy around the difficulties of leaving an abusive partner. At the time she engaged with Refuge she did not feel ready to make that permanent break but to know they were there when she needed them was a huge help and knowing about the outreach support was helpful.



IDVA not only created the robust safety plan with Jess but gave her the encouragement she needed to link in with other services. She also knew that she could contact the DA Hub whenever she needed to and had received support from the Early Intervention Team.



Early Help, Education and Hatch gave invaluable support to her children. As supportive as Jess was to the children, she really encouraged them to speak with professionals as she knew they may prefer to open up to someone else.



Housing helped her and her children to move into a new property where they could all start to feel safe and rebuild their lives.



Making her GP aware of the abuse helped to give them context of her mental health difficulties and so they were better equipped to support her.



Probation keeping her updated through the Victim Liaison Officer helped her to manage her fears about his release

Voice of the Victim/Survivor

- It's 100% made a positive impact. I'd be worried where I'd be now if I hadn't had support. I only wanted to feel 'alright' but I feel more than okay. It's a massive gift and I really appreciate it.
- It's been about ME! It's been individualized. I felt completely understood by the services that supported me.
- I'm actually looking forward to the future now rather than living in fear.
- I can't thank everyone enough!

