

Unknown male carers and risk 7 Minute Briefing

1. Background

Reviews in Salford and the GM area have highlighted that there are “unknown” males who are involved in the child’s life but professionals working with the family are not aware or not actively engaging with them.

This is backed up by the findings of national panel research: the [Myth of Invisible Men](#), a report which looks specifically at cases where children under the age of 12 months had been harmed by male carers.

2. Findings

Unknown males* can be fathers or step fathers; partners or ex-partners; partners or relatives of childminders; grandfathers, uncles, other relatives, or family acquaintances.

Previous research by the [NSPCC](#) has identified two categories of unknown males: i) those who posed a risk to the child ii) those who were capable of protecting the child. However, men can be both, and an approach that is characterised by support and challenge - listening, and holding to account, is required. *consider female partners also

3. Findings

Services in the antenatal and postnatal period are geared primarily to meet the needs of women and children.

Evidence from the national panel research suggests that a lot of men are eager to be actively engaged with these services, including some who have gone on to harm their children.

4. Findings

Services need to be better attuned to situations where a number of factors may combine together to create risk to babies:

A background of abusive or neglectful parenting, poor attachment; impulsive behaviour and low frustration threshold; substance misuse; easy default to violence and anger; external pressures.

5. Findings

Evidence from the national panel research shows that some fathers responded positively when they sensed a genuine interest being taken in them. Anecdotal evidence shows many fathers respond positively in Salford.

The need is to develop an authentic engagement, less about assessment checklists, more about the whole person behind the risks and concerns.

6. Putting learning into practice

Working with and engaging male carers is not an “add-on” but an essential part of working with families.

During pregnancy and after birth, make active enquiries about the child’s father (and other potential carers), from all sources, not just from the mother, and make direct contact with them.

Encourage and support the mother to see the importance of the role of the significant other in the child's life.

7. Putting learning into practice

In Salford a multi-agency training course called "Positive Fatherhood" is being developed.

This course will emphasise the role of positive fatherhood and encourage confidence and more effective engagement with male carers, whilst keeping a focus on [professional curiosity](#) and assessment of risk.

Good practice: [Research in Practice – working effectively with men in families](#)

Additional Information

Date Published: 16/06/2022

Visit: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/>

Email: SSCP@salford.gov.uk
