

1

Background

Men and other significant family members can play very important roles in children's lives and have a big influence on the children they care for. Despite this, they can be ignored by professionals who sometimes focus almost exclusively on the care children receive from mothers and female carers.



Hidden Males



2

Why it matters

An analysis of SCRs1 by the NSPCC using cases which highlighted the issue of professionals not identifying and/or assessing key men, such as fathers or mothers' partners, involved in the care of children who died or suffered harm identified two categories of 'hidden' males; those who (a) posed a risk to the child which resulted in them suffering harm; and (b) those who were capable of nurturing and protecting the child, for example, estranged fathers who were overlooked by professionals.

7

Further information

[NSPCC Learning - Hidden Males](#)

[Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#)

[Find out if a person has a record for child sexual offences](#)

3

Significant people

Without basic information about significant people, it is unlikely that they will be contacted and this perpetuates the lack of information. Reasons put forward for not involving key individuals include: lack of engagement; unavailability due to work patterns or other commitments; separation/not living in household; mother requests no involvement; intimidation by the 'significant other'; assumption that they will not want to participate.

6

What can professionals do?

During pregnancy and after birth, make active enquiries about the child's father.
From the outset identify 'significant' people in the child's life e.g. partners (current and 'estranged'), siblings, extended family members and friends. Talk to them.
Clarify who are the members of the household, their relationship to each other and the role they play.
Take into account some people may be using nicknames, aliases, be given false status, for example, 'uncle'. When making checks, allow for different spellings of names.
Use different sources to gather information – the main carer of the child may be in a coercive/controlling situation.
Use professional curiosity

5

Continued...

Not wishing to appear judgmental

Professionals can be reluctant to judge the decisions parents make about their personal and sexual relationships. Risks can however be posed to children by men who are in short-term, casual relationships with the mothers.

Overlooking the ability of estranged fathers to provide safe care for their children

Failing to identify and / or engage with fathers ignores their fundamental importance in a child's emotional and psychological development. When a vulnerable child's needs are not being met by their mother, an estranged father may be able to provide the protection and stability that the child needs.

4

Why aren't 'hidden' males included?

Lack of information sharing between services

Professionals involved with men who are fathers (such as substance misuse workers and probation officers) do not tend to share information about potential risks. They may be unaware the men have contact with their children

Relying too much on mothers for essential information

Professionals sometimes rely too much on mothers to tell them about men involved in their children's lives. If mothers are putting their own needs first, they may not be honest about the risk these men pose to their children. Professionals do not always talk enough to other people involved in a child's life, such as the mother's estranged partner(s), siblings, extended family and friends.