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Background

In 2020 the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel received notification of 180 serious incidents relating to the death or serious injury of children under 1 in England and Wales.

The panel completed its third national review of serious, safeguarding incidents in September 2021, with a focus on safeguarding children from non-accidental injury.

The report that followed, '**The Myth of Invisible Men**' highlighted areas of learning for the safeguarding system.

A number of high-profile serious case reviews including that of Victoria Climbié (2000) and Peter Connelly (2007), identified risks associated with the unknown males in children's lives.

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Why it matters

Over the last decade, the term '*hidden male*' has been used in safeguarding practice to highlight the risk from mother's new partner, stepfathers, lodgers, friends etc.

However, the national panel found that **in 88% of cases, violence against babies had been committed by birth Fathers**, hence the title of the report being 'The Myth of Invisible Men.'

Birth Fathers are more likely to kill, or seriously harm their babies than stepfathers at a ratio of 10:1. They are often very visible to practitioners, but it is the way that services work with them that places them out of sight.

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Information

Practitioners working with families do not see the behaviours, lives and relationships of Fathers in a manner which allows them to be appropriately understood.

Support available in the postnatal period recognises the inherent vulnerability of babies under 1 year but are often directed towards Mothers, not Fathers.

There is a need to think family!

Practitioners should consider the cumulative risk of harm when multiple factors combine, which can create an environment where violence towards babies is more likely to occur.

The review found that anger, low tolerance and high frustration are key characteristics of violent fathers.

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Of note, the behaviour from violent Fathers did not usually include serious violence towards other adults. Consequently, Fathers identified in the review had not commonly come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The review did find that violent Fathers were more likely to suffer with poor mental health including ADHD, anger management, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety characterised by sleeplessness, irritability, agitation, low tolerance, increased impulsivity, poor emotional and behavioural regulation.

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Questions to consider

Discuss this briefing and associated resources in your next team meeting.

Have a reflective discussion around the '**Myth of Invisible Men**' in relation to the work you do with children, families, parents and carers.

- Seek safeguarding supervision,
- Stay child focused.
- Adopt a **think family** approach to safeguarding children under 1 year.
- Let us know how you have embedded this learning and its impact on practice.

[The Myth of Invisible Men \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[ICON: Babies Cry, You Can Cope! - Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board](#)

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What to do

A crying / unsettled baby has been identified as a significant precipitating factor in the national review for violent incidents involving babies under 1 year.

The need to identify males, consider the role they play in children's lives and share information across services has been identified as an area of learning for the Children's Safeguarding Assurance partnership.

ICON is a national, public health campaign that aims to reduce the risk of violence and abusive head trauma for babies under 1 year.

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Risk Factors

- Conflict in Mother / Father relationship that may not be accompanied by physical violence or relationship breakdown / recent separation.
- In 88% of incidents included in the review, babies were in the sole care of Fathers at the time the violence occurred.
- The majority of violent Fathers considered in the review had no convictions for violent crime or domestic abuse and had not come to the attention of police / probation / MARAC.
- Poverty has also been recognised in the review as a contextual risk factor in relation to the impact financial worries / unemployment / deprivation has on stress levels and risk of violence towards babies.

