

01 Background Men can play a vital role in their children's development and wellbeing. An analysis of case reviews, however, shows that fathers, male caregivers and male partners sometimes go 'unseen' by services involved with children. Services and practitioners tended to focus on the mother's role as caregiver, reducing opportunities for men in a child's life to be involved.

02 Who are 'unseen men?' Two main types of unseen men (sometimes referred to as 'hidden' men) have been identified in case reviews.

1. Men who posed a risk to a child, which resulted in the child suffering serious harm or death.
2. Men who could have protected and nurtured the child in their life but were overlooked by professionals.

03 Findings from Learning or Case Reviews

Recent audit and Learning Review activity in Edinburgh has found little or no identification and assessment of adult male carers and male influences in children's assessment and planning. This represents a significant gap and is not aligned with Child Protection Procedure.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel reviewed cases in England where babies under one year old were harmed or killed by their fathers or other males in a caring role and suggested services need to be better attuned to a series of factors that may cause harm to young children.

04 Why is it important?

At every stage in a child's life, male caregivers play an important role in a child's cognitive, emotional and physical development. They may be primary caregivers who offer day-to-day caring responsibilities.

Without including men, there are missed opportunities or gaps in assessments and safety plans.

The Edinburgh and Lothians Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures emphasises main caregivers should be included at every stage of the process, unless there are clearly recoded risks in doing so. We must seek to achieve shared understanding with parents and carers, wherever possible.

07 Additional Resources

The Myths of invisible Men, Crown 2021

Unseen Men: learning from case reviews, NSPCC 2022

Executive Summary Report Child F&G will soon be available on ECPC Webpage.

06 Key messages for Practice

- Seek support, supervision and collaborate with the team around the child to explore engagement with 'unseen men', especially where there could be potentially abusive or intimidating behaviours.
- Seek clarity on information sharing thresholds and when to refer on concerns for a child's wellbeing or safety.
- Identify all the adults in a child's life by asking the primary caregiver, recording and checking with other services, especially where there are new adults identified.
- Employ preventative approaches to involve and include male caregivers in child wellbeing and start the dialogue where there are concerns or potentially harmful behaviours.

05 Why do male caregivers go unseen?

- There can be an over-focus on maternal caregivers, with services relying heavily on a mother for details and explanations, which can allow male caregivers to be overlooked or to remain on the periphery.
- Services are often set-up during normal working hours or are focused on maternal caregivers. There are a handful of tailored resources for male caregiver, like Dad's Rock in Edinburgh.
- There can be a lack of information sharing, especially from adult substance use or mental health resources, who remain concerned about client confidentiality and GDPR. Our Child Protection Procedures are clear that everyone has a responsibility for ensuring children are safe and cared for.

