 

Jessica\* is a 35 year old women with two children, Harry\* aged 7 and Sophia\* aged 4. Jessica and the children have experienced domestic abuse perpetrated by Sam, a 39 year old man and the children’s father. Jessica and Sam separated last year.

When Jessica and Sam were together, police were called out on multiple occasions to reports of domestic abuse perpetrated by Sam. However, no charges were ever brought against Sam.

The children currently live with Jessica, and there are private law family court proceedings underway to decide where the children will live and who they will live with. Harry and Sophia currently see Sam one day at the weekend and one evening after school/nursery. Children’s Services had been involved with the family prior to Family Court proceedings as concerns for the children’s safety, wellbeing and development were raised by multiple agencies. Harry and Sophia were subject to a Child in Need plan which ended when Jessica and Sam separated. Jessica and Sam both accessed parenting programmes separately, although Sam was unable to complete this as he worked away in the week.

Since Family Court proceedings began, Sam has been calling Jessica more frequently to speak to the children. Jessica puts her phone on loud speaker as she is worried what Sam may say to the children. Sam tells the children he has recently bought a big house so Harry and Sophia can live with him. They will have their own rooms and he will take them on holiday to Disneyland in the summer. Harry and Sophia are very excited about this as they have to share a room in their current home. Jessica works part-time so she can pick up and drop off the children at school. She doesn’t have family nearby who can help. Sometimes Sam asks Harry what his mum does when Harry and Sophia aren’t at home. Sam asks Harry who she is seeing and whether anyone else comes to the house.

Since the separation, Jessica has struggled with her mental health. Not long after Sophia was born, Jessica attempted suicide. She was diagnosed with depression and takes regular medication. Jessica has told her Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) that she is really worried that Sam may get custody of the children. Jessica has said that her children are everything to her. Jessica has disclosed that she is drinking alcohol when the children are not with her to cope with how she is feeling. She has been referred to alcohol support services.

Some professionals have raised concerns about Jessica’s alcohol use and that she is unable to keep the children safe when she is drinking. School and nursery report that when Sam brings the children to their education setting, they arrive early, are well presented, look happy and have new clothes or toys they want to show staff. When Jessica brings the children in, they have often late and on a few occasions, Sophia has been very upset and clinging to mum. Harry has been seen by staff to shout at mum and Jessica shouts back.

* Is there evidence of post-separation abuse and coercive control? How can agencies recognise and respond to this?
* How could the HSCP and IOWSCP Domestic Abuse Toolkit be used to understand Harry and Sophia’s daily lived experiences/routine and consider the potential impact on their presentation?
* How might the Family Court process exacerbate Jessica, Harry and Sophia’s experiences of abuse and coercive control?
* Was there professional curiosity as to why Jessica may be struggling? Were agencies responses trauma-informed? What support can be offered to her?

Resources:

[HSCP Training: Post Separation Abuse-Using the Courts and Child Contact Arrangements](https://hampshirescp.event-booking.org.uk/event-detail/%3DUjM3ETM/VIRTUAL-HSCP---Post-Separation-Abuse--Using-the-Courts-and-Child-Contact-Arrangements)

[Assessing risk of harm to children and parents in private law children cases](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ef3dd32d3bf7f7142efc034/domestic-abuse-private-law-children-cases-literature-review.pdf)

[Adopting a Family Approach - Hampshire SCP](https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/professionals/toolkits/adopting-a-family-approach-joint-toolkit/)

[HDAP Domestic Abuse Guidance for Schools](https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/DA-Guidance-for-Schools-Oct-2022.pdf)

[Operation Encompass](https://www.operationencompass.org/)