

# The Role of Child Removal in Female Drug and Alcohol Related Deaths across the North West, and Midlands Regions of England

Cara Citraro, Mark Whitfield, Howard Reed  
Public Health Institute, Liverpool John Moores University

## Background:

Twenty-six local authorities across the North West and Midlands regions of England have commissioned Liverpool John Moores University's Public Health Institute to undertake systematic monitoring of Drug and Alcohol Related Deaths (DARDs) and broader mortality within drug treatment services.

The monitoring system (IMS) collates information from various organisations such as drug treatment services, mental health services, social care, housing, and criminal justice through a bespoke online portal.

This data is used to convene multi-agency panels where selected individual cases are discussed in order to identify recurrent themes, highlight systemic issues, and disseminate findings with the aim of preventing future DARDs.

In 2024, a prominent theme emerged regarding the removal of children into care and its impact on substance use among women. Consequently, a new data item capturing children's services involvement was introduced onto IMS in 2025.

## Approach:

To explore the theme of child removal in more detail, a data extract from IMS was taken to identify relevant cases for a thematic analysis.

Criteria for this extract comprised:

- Children's Services Involvement="Yes" OR
- The word "children" was included within the panel notes recorded on IMS after an individual case was discussed

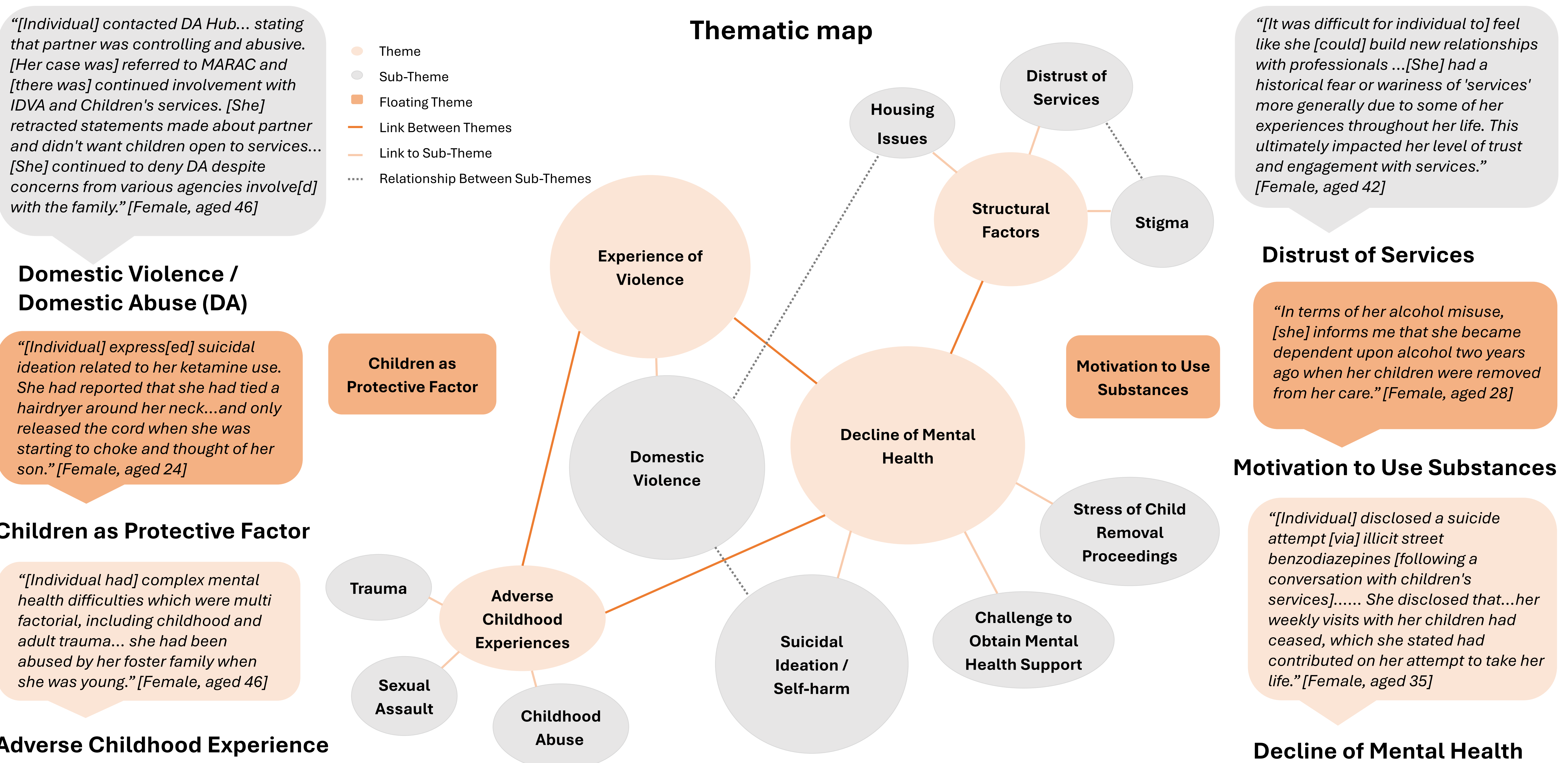


The extract identified 171 distinct records

- Most cases had a date of death between the years of 2023 – 2025 (n=157).
- Females were represented in 64.3% of cases (n=110 out of 171)
- Of the 110 female cases, 68 cases had previously been discussed at a DARD panel.

Since cases discussed at DARD panels will have more detailed information about the deceased individuals' lives, the 68 female cases that had been previously discussed at panel were screened for relevance, resulting in 24 cases being selected for the thematic analysis.

## Findings:



## Recommendations:

- **Need for multi-agency collaboration:** Effective wraparound support across health, social care, and safeguarding services is required both prior to and following child removal.
- **Need to incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives into public policy evaluation,** particularly within social care and safeguarding frameworks.
- **Appropriate policy response:** Policy responses should ensure the provision of adequate resources for women and investment in interventions that aim to keep families together, where possible.

## Key Takeaway:

- **Children act as a protective factor** for women.
- **Once removed, many women suffer a substantial decline in mental health and use substances to cope with the loss.**
- Interventions should aim to **keep families together.** Where not possible, **effective wrap-around support** is essential prior to and following child removal.



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Public Health Institute  
LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Contact details: C.T.Citraro@ljmu.ac.uk