

Coroner concludes that domestic abuse victim died from suicide

5 January 2023

**Before Area Coroner Ms Catherine McKenna
Greater Manchester North Coroner's Court
12 – 14 December 2022 and 3 January 2023**

Lauren Murray, 38, died at her home in Oldham on 6 June 2020. After hearing three days of evidence the Coroner for Greater Manchester North returned factual findings and conclusions that Lauren had been a victim of serious high risk domestic abuse, and that she had died from suicide following an argument with her estranged husband, Anthony Murray.

The Coroner also indicated that she intended to make a report to prevent future deaths to Greater Manchester Police in relation to their response to Lauren's death and the failure on their part, in the immediate aftermath of her death, to urgently seize the evidence of Lauren's phone and electronic communications with Anthony Murray.

In 2021 a joint Domestic Homicide Review and Safeguarding Adults Review commissioned by Oldham Safeguarding Partnership had concluded that Lauren had become trapped in a cycle where she was trying to extricate herself from her abusive relationship with her estranged husband to enjoy more frequent contact with her children, and although she had been making substantial progress, her estranged husband remained a periodic and abusive presence in her life. The Review had made a series of recommendations including to increase professional awareness of the link between domestic abuse and self-harm and suicide.

Background

Lauren was a vibrant personality who lit up the room. She was the mother of three children to whom she was devoted. In January 2016 she took the sudden decision of leaving the father of her children and marrying a man named Anthony Murray, an older man with a history of drug use. The relationship was characterised by physical, emotional and financial domestic abuse and had a very serious impact on Lauren's mental health, leading to a number of mental health crises and at least four attempts at suicide.

In late 2016 Anthony Murray had been charged with assault, criminal damage and coercive control all in relation to domestic abuse perpetrated upon Lauren. The trial did not go ahead due to Lauren withdrawing her support for the prosecution. During 2017 and 2018 Anthony Murray had been arrested for a number of domestic abuse offences upon Lauren who was identified as being a high risk case and was referred to a MARAC (a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference for high risk victims of domestic abuse).

As a result of the relationship with Anthony Murray, a child arrangement order had been put in place in 2017, placing Lauren's youngest child with Lauren's parents. It was a condition of Lauren's access to her children that she was not in a relationship with Anthony Murray. Lauren had been preoccupied with regaining access and residency of her children, and this was a key part of the dynamic between Lauren, her parents, her ex partner and Anthony Murray.

Lauren had a regular and supportive relationship with her GP and a domestic abuse worker and both gave evidence to the inquest that Lauren's mental health improved when she was separated from Anthony Murray, and that a pattern would emerge where she would fall out with her family, start drinking and reconcile with Anthony Murray, causing a deterioration of her mental health and an increase in suicidality.

In 2019 Anthony Murray was out of the UK which allowed Lauren to start to rebuild her life, access therapy and start to progress her divorce. She was regularly seeing a domestic abuse support worker, her GP and a therapist. The inquest heard that Lauren emailed her solicitor in August 2019 to say "*I would like to stress how important it is for me to get divorced from Anthony and I need my children back in my life. I was stuck in a spiral of control by him - each time I went back I would lose access to seeing the children*". Divorce papers were filed in October 2019.

By 2020 Lauren was regularly seeing her children, which was identified by all as being a key protective factor for her. In April 2020 Lauren disclosed to her domestic abuse worker that her greatest fear was that Anthony Murray would destroy everything that she had worked so hard to rebuild. On 4 June 2020 Lauren had an assessment with a psychotherapist during which she disclosed having suicidal thoughts twice a week. Although she did not disclose that she was in resumed contact with Anthony Murray, she did discuss her decision making in the context of abusive relationships and that she did not feel that she had control.

Coroner's factual findings

After hearing 3 days of evidence, within the Coroner's factual findings, the following was recorded:

- The relationship between Lauren and Anthony Murray was marred by alcohol, drug-taking, violence, psychological abuse and a pattern of frequent break-ups followed by reconciliations.
- Lauren had been subjected to controlling and coercive behaviours by Anthony Murray between 2016 and 2018. During this time, she had experienced other significant and traumatic life events including relationship breakdown, loss of her home and the loss of the custody of her children.
- Following a separation in 2019 and significant progress made during 2020, by the end of January 2020 some contact had resumed between Lauren and Anthony Murray. Lauren was not transparent about this with her domestic abuse worker, her GP or her family.
- In the week before her death, the Coroner found that Lauren had spent regular time with Anthony Murray including going to Piccadilly Gardens with him and his grandchild on 1 June 2020 and speaking on the phone on the night of 5 June 2020.
- During the night of 5/6 June 2020 an argument developed between Lauren and Anthony Murray culminating in two messages retrieved by Greater Manchester Police, both of which evidenced threats by Anthony Murray to send messages to the family and post on Facebook, therefore disclosing their resumed contact.
- The Coroner found that the threat of exposure would have caused Lauren to suffer "*immense distress*". Overall she concluded that on 5 June 2020 Lauren had reached a "*tipping point*" with the "*realisation that she had found herself back in the cycle that she had worked so hard to escape*".
- Lauren impulsively applied a ligature round her neck in the aftermath of this argument. The Coroner found that although impulsive, in that moment she had intended to take her own life.

The Coroner indicated her intention to make a report to Greater Manchester Police in relation to the evidence gathering in the aftermath of Lauren's death. She said that she was satisfied that she did not need to make a report to prevent future deaths in relation to the link between suicide and domestic abuse as she had accepted the findings of the Domestic Homicide Review / Safeguarding Adults Review were being implemented, including in respect of developments to the Greater Manchester Suicide Prevention strategy.

Mrs Bernadette Royales and Mr Frank Royales, Lauren's parents said:

The inquest has allowed our Lauren's story to be heard and we welcome the Coroner's factual findings which recognise the years of domestic abuse and coercive control that Lauren was subjected to at the hands of her perpetrator. We believe that the abuse Lauren suffered had a fateful impact on her mental health and is key to understanding her death.

We will always remember Lauren as a very loving mother, daughter, sister, relative and friend to all who knew her. She was kind, funny, charismatic and is sorely missed. Her death leaves a massive void in our family life and we feel the impact and deep sadness of her loss every day.

It has always been our view that Greater Manchester Police failed to properly investigate Lauren's death and that they lost the opportunity to seize potential evidence, despite knowing very well the history of high risk domestic abuse. We call on GMP to review their policies and ensure that there is a presumption of robust evidence gathering following the sudden deaths of women in the context of domestic abuse. We hope that the Coroner's prevention of future death report will lead to improved investigations for other families who lose loved ones in these circumstances".

The family's solicitor, Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors said:

"This family have fought for two and a half years to have a full inquiry into the circumstances of Lauren's death, via criminal investigation, Domestic Homicide Review and finally this inquest. As a result of their battle to ensure proper scrutiny, we have heard three days of distressing evidence about a woman battling to resume contact with her children whilst struggling to escape a dangerous and abusive relationship. It is clear that Lauren felt trapped in a cycle of abuse that she was ultimately unable to escape.

It is essential that the link between domestic abuse and suicide is better understood, and the family are encouraged by the responses to Lauren's death, in particular that the Oldham, Manchester and Greater Manchester Suicide Prevention Strategies will work to establish a better understanding of the risk of suicide in the context of abuse. We have heard evidence at the inquest about the inadequacy of the standardised risk assessments in identifying coercive control which is key to understanding risk of both domestic homicide and suicide. This is a national issue which requires urgent improvement.

Whilst Lauren's perpetrator has not been found guilty of any criminal offences against Lauren, the context of abuse and the role it played in Lauren's struggles with her mental health is now part of the public record. Lauren's family can only hope that Lauren's death will serve to increase understanding of the link between domestic abuse and suicide and help other victims and their families.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information, interview requests and to note your interest, please contact Sophie Naftalin at s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk

The family are represented by Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy and Sophie Walker of One Pump Court. They also received support from Melanie Lumsdaine from the charity Action After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA).

Journalists should refer to the [Samaritans Media Guidelines](#) for reporting suicide and self-harm and [guidance for reporting on inquests](#).