

4 May 2020

Weekly Update from the Domestic Abuse Sector

Background

1. Every week, Nicole Jacobs chairs a conference call with national helpline providers, second tier organisations, and Government Departments to share emerging trends, facilitate cross-sector working, and to escalate issues as required.

Helplines

2. **There continues to be increased demand across national helplines and most support services**, with the average calls and contacts to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline remaining around 50% higher than pre-lockdown averages. The following key issues were also noted:
 - a. **Calls continue to be complex and average call times are longer than pre-lockdown**, reflecting an increase in emotional support calls rather than those that just provide practical advice.
 - b. **Changes in types of callers were noted** - small decrease on NDAH from 67% to 64% of survivors, and small increases in family, friends and neighbours calling on behalf of loved ones. Karma Nirvana saw a 38% & 35% decrease in referrals by police and children's social services, and a 28% increase in victims self-referring.
 - c. **Continued increase in web traffic and live chat across the board** - confirms trend of victims using more discrete forms of technology to access services. Respect's male perpetrators' web chat saw increase to 229 contacts in April, compared to 18 in March and 12 in Feb, whilst Galop saw a 76% increase in website traffic compared to pre-lockdown.
 - d. **Funding has been received by some helplines**, including Refuge, Respect, Galop and Surviving Economic Abuse who have been provided with additional funds by the Home Office.
 - e. **Increase in other issues crossing over with domestic abuse** - notably mental health issues, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia - where these issues are being used as an excuse for abuse.

General Sector Updates and other issues:

3. **Services expressed concerns about continued lack of clarity about different funding streams and which funds would be available to different services.** While funding already allocated via the Home Office to helplines is welcome, it is unclear how the remaining funding will be distributed and Departments do not appear to be closely aligned in how organisations can bid, including how this will interact with the Lottery funding.
4. **There are still concerns about the large portion of funding being distributed via PCCs, which would need to be closely monitored to ensure that smaller specialist organisations (including by and for BAME and disabled women) were not excluded from this process.** Strict guidelines for the PCCs on ring fencing or distributing funds equitably, produced in collaboration with the sector, would be strongly encouraged.
5. **All services predict a bottleneck in demand for later in the year as restrictions are lifted**, and called for funding and resources to reflect this and not be too time-bound for

within the lock-down period. It is essential that outputs within this timeframe are not tied in with grant agreements, to avoid a situation where charities are required to hand back funding just as they experience a post-lockdown surge in demand. This could be a particular issue for organisations supporting disabled victims, who may be shielding for longer and so reach out after a longer period of time.

6. **Services expressed need for a national focus on the rising issue of child and adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse**, in the form of more data collection, and increased communications about this issue. There is currently very limited avenues for support for individuals experiencing this kind of abuse, and a dedicated helpline would bring enormous benefit in the longer term.
7. **Providing appropriate housing options for perpetrators remains a key priority, particularly in cases where judges are reticent to grant Domestic Violence Protection Orders for fear of rendering the perpetrator homeless.** The police continue to challenge judges on this issue, but Local Authorities and MHCLG need to ensure that appropriate housing is available for perpetrators to go to, if necessary making use of offers from hotel chains or university accommodation.
8. **There is continued support for utilising retailers to provide a safe space for victims and survivors to seek support - either through a 'code word' or a more general communications campaign.** It remains essential to make sure this is consistent across geographical areas, and does not come with any additional security risks.
9. **There were calls for clarity on whether refuge residents would also be eligible for testing, alongside those who work in refuges.** This could help alleviate concerns about residents having to self-isolate within refuges, or having to seek out alternative accommodation if they display any symptoms.

Attendees:

Sector: Refuge, Karma Nirvana, Women's Aid Federation England, Welsh Women's Aid, Respect, SafeLives, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition, Galop, Rights of Women, Latin American Women Rights Service (as representatives of the Step Up Migrant Women Campaign), IRISi, Surviving Economic Abuse, The Employers' Initiative, Imkaan

Government Officials: Association of PCCs, Home Office, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Justice, Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Social Care, Welsh Government, Local Government Association, National Police Chief's Council