

20 April 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. This was the fifth meeting and attendees are listed below.

Helplines

2. **There continues to be increased demand across national helplines and most support services**, possibly in part down to increased awareness through the Home Office's 'you are not alone' campaign. The following key issues were also noted:
 - a. **Complex cases and longer calls continue to increase** -this reflects an increase in emotional support calls, from victims and survivors struggling with a lack of face-to-face support
 - b. **Changes in types of callers were noted** - a drop in calls from schools and increase in calls from social services as well as an increase in concerned friends and family calling for advice
 - 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. Increases as high as 581% from before lockdown - 16 March
 - d. **Mental health issues coming across strongly in helpline calls** - including in perpetrators lines, which reflects the accumulating effect of lockdown conditions during Covid-19 on mental health. We will be bringing together mental health and domestic abuse helpline providers with DH and the Home Office to share learning and ensure callers receive appropriate and consistent advice.
 - e. **General increase in concerns over stalking and online harassment** noted across the board - reflects changes in perpetrator's behaviour due to lockdown conditions
 - f. **There is a worrying trend emerging in young people and sex workers not reporting incidents of sexual violence to police** for fear of punishment for breaking lockdown rules
 - g. **Women living with perpetrators still not calling Family Law helplines** - which suggests that Government messaging that Family Courts are open still not strong enough, and that women are not able to prioritise their legal needs at the current time
 - h. **Issues around immigration are emerging**- helplines have reported victims and survivors finding it more difficult to progress new immigration applications, with some receiving requests to send documents outside of business hours
 - i. **All services predict a bottleneck in demand for later in the year as restrictions are lifted** and call for funding and resources to reflect this

Other issues: