

27 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 sixth meeting and attendees are listed below.

Helplines

2. **Helpline updates: 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 currently around 50% higher than pre-lockdown averages. The following key issues were also noted:
 - a. **Complex cases and longer calls continue to increase** -this reflects an increase in emotional support calls rather than those that just provide practical advice. Galop have been doubling staff on shifts as a trial measure to deal with this increase, and noted the increased strain on capacity that this creates.
 - b. **Changes in types of callers were noted** - Karma Nirvana noted a 10% drop in calls from police, an 85% decrease from schools, and a 138% increase in calls from social workers, reflecting the change in access to statutory services under lock-down.
 - c. **Concerns from helpline users are overwhelmingly Covid-19 related** - victims note difficulty of lockdown conditions for seeking help and support, and perpetrators consistently mention difficulty of feeling restricted. Respect's data suggests that differing perspectives over isolation with households frequently leads to arguments and tension.
 - d. **Continued increase in web traffic and live chat across the board** - confirms trend of victims using more discrete forms of technology to access services. Refuge recorded 300% increase in web traffic compared to pre-lockdown.

General Sector Updates and other issues:

- a. **Services expressed concerns about lack of clarity in funding communications and stretched services.** No further detail on the funding announcements or timelines has been released, and money is desperately needed now. For example, 28% of Respect members have had to furlough staff, some up to 80%, although demand for services continues to increase, and some helplines are already needing to increase shifts.
- b. **There are still concerns about large portions of the £750m announced by the Chancellor being distributed via PCCs, which was likely to exclude the smaller specialist organisations (including BAME organisations) who need it most.** Further detail on when and how this funding will be distributed to the frontline was urgently requested, but is not expected for at least a week.
- c. **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.