

Official Sensitive – Draft

General Public Sector Ministerial Implementation Group (GPS MIG)

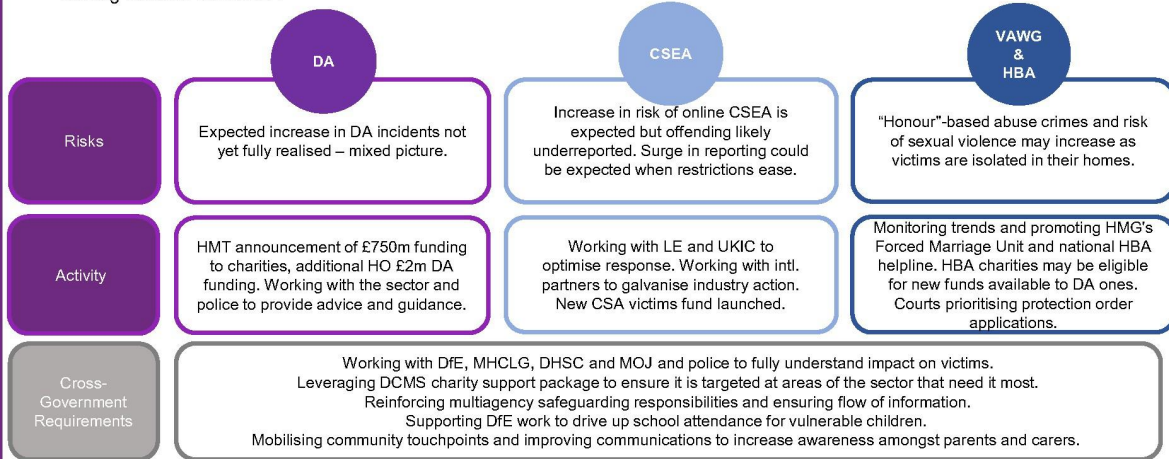
Threat and Response to Hidden Crimes



14 April 2020

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

- **School closures, social distancing measures** and **increased online exposure** have left vulnerable groups at heightened risk of hidden crimes, which are already chronically under-reported.
- We are **working closely with key partners** to understand changing trends, but it may be some weeks before we have a fuller understanding, and we should prepare for a rise in reporting as restrictions ease.
- We are working to ensure **safeguarding continues to be prioritised** by local partners, but with frontline services under strain, we must also mobilise community stakeholders to **identify risk and signpost vulnerable people to support**.
- We have announced **additional funding for domestic abuse (DA) and child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) charities** to build their capacity to meet changing demand/needs and will leverage broader support packages announced by CX on 8 April to ensure funding reaches the sector.



Domestic Abuse

- Some service providers reporting **increased online access to support** and two organisations reported increases in helpline calls. A reported increase of 29% over the last week in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline.
- Police not yet reporting any increase in calls** – however some anecdotal reporting of increased DA cases at A&E departments in the South East.
- Pressure from the sector/DA Commissioner** to increase funding due to anticipated increase in incidents.

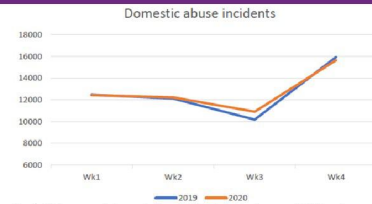


Fig 1: Police recorded a reduction in DA-related calls overall. Extensive comms from HO, police and stakeholders encouraging victims to dial 999 or contact helplines.

Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

- Multiple law enforcement agencies note **dedicated offender forums welcoming isolation and reduced supervision**, but this is not yet manifesting in reports or observed activity.
- 'Cappers' (who screenshot images of unaware children) are particularly active in their conversation.
- The **Internet Watch Foundation reports unchanged volumes of public reports** of CSEA material but is only operating at 50% capacity.
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation saw a **50% drop in calls to its StopItNow! Helpline** in early March, but **more recently calls to the service have increased**, pointing to more potential offenders seeking support.. We continue to monitor helpline usage.

VAWG & HBA

- Charities fear worsening of "honour"-based abuse** as victims are isolated with perpetrators. Reduced travel and isolation measures make actual forced marriages less likely (hence drop in calls to HMG's Forced Marriage Unit), but coercive behaviour surrounding them may increase. Less concern on FGM, as it is not carried out for punitive reasons.
- After an initial dip, the national honour-based abuse **helpline has witnessed more calls and increased COVID-related risks** to a number of callers. NSPCC's FGM helpline reports no increased risk.
- Risk of increase in sexual violence within households** due to increased opportunities, however, not yet being reported. Revenge Porn Helpline has reported an increase in contacts since the lockdown but does not necessarily equate to an increase in cases.

Domestic Abuse

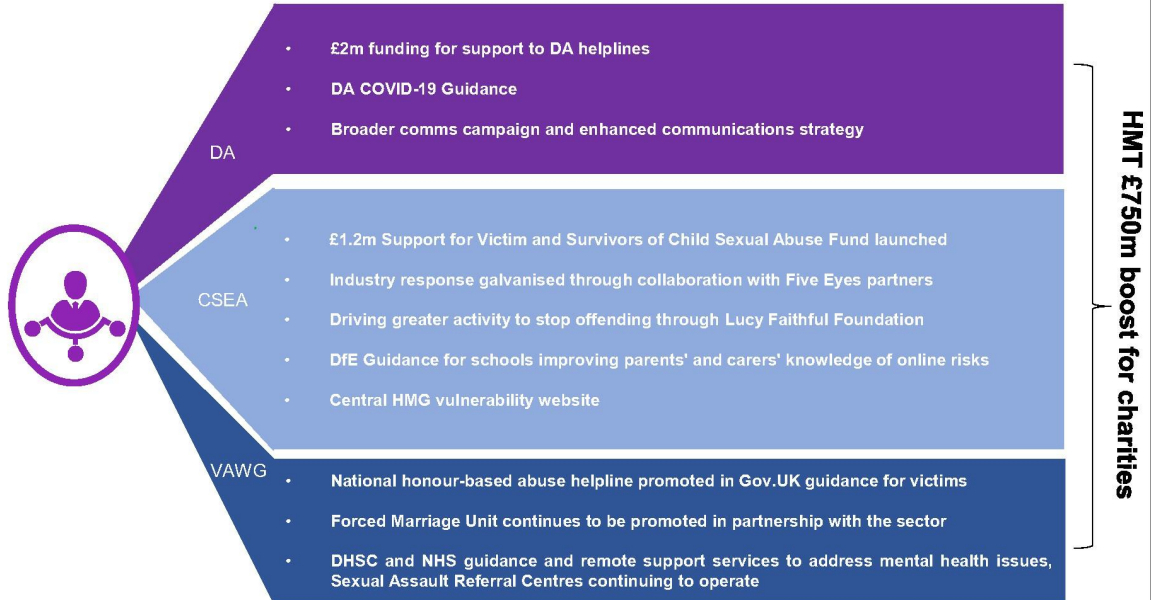
- **Police safeguarding prioritised:** police are adapting operational practice to respond to pressures, working on communications to victims and perpetrators. HO are developing guidance on Domestic Violence Protection Orders to clarify how these interact with any medically ordered self-isolation under the emergency legislation, and working with MHCLG to understand concerns from LAs on ability to enforce.
- **MoJ helpline** being set up for victims so they can check if "their" offender is due for, or has been, released.
- **Early release:** DA perpetrators being dealt with under MAPPA are not eligible for early-release. Where the sentence itself is not directly DA related, checks will be run to see if there is any record of abuse.

CSEA

- **Law enforcement capability:** GCHQ and the NCA continuing to prioritise high-risk offenders. We are working with law enforcement on adapting to COVID-19 by repurposing underspend (should it occur) against agreed pursue activities.
- **Industry data:** increased use of home fixed-line broadband connections creates opportunity for law enforcement, as these are typically easier to resolve and action than mobile access
- **Joint Operations Team:** assessing dark web offender communications and ensuring that this enriches the online intelligence picture.
- **Early prisoner release:** barring two exceptions, no CSEA offenders will be released under this scheme. The exceptions are pregnant offenders/those in other and baby units and vulnerable prisoners with a terminal illness. Thorough risk-assessment procedures will be in place.
- **NPCC activity:** enriching data collection, reinforcing safeguarding responsibilities and providing social distancing guidance to emphasise the importance of identifying vulnerability

VAWG & HBA

- **Protective orders:** urgent orders are being prioritised by the courts.
- **Intel picture:** Police are monitoring contact with helplines and NGOs to understand and mitigate changes in HBA criminality.



Cross-cutting requirements for effective safeguarding responses

Statutory safeguarding and education settings

- Working with DfE, DHSC and operational partners to prepare for a surge in reporting following easing of lockdown restrictions.
- Working with DHSC and DfE to guarantee equitable access to PPE for all safeguarding partners to enable safe visits to children's homes and families.
- Working with DfE to drive up school attendance across vulnerable cohorts, establishing an effective system to safeguard those not attending education settings (including early years, schools and colleges) and improving data collection.
- Identifying and sharing areas of good practice across non-statutory support provision (e.g. youth work) to protect at risk groups.

Signposting and support to victims

- Ensuring efficient dispersal of additional new funding for charities to increase operational capacity and support in priority areas, including building reach and capacity for NSPCC helpline for concerned adults.
- Working with DCMS to build on industry and sector engagement to push comms campaigns and reduce online harms.
- Working with DCMS to ensure vulnerable adults, families and victims of crime are prioritised for electronic devices and connectivity provision, enabling access to support services.
- Mobilising potential protective 'eyes and ears' in the COVID environment, equipping community volunteers and frontline staff to spot risk flags.
- Increasing signposting to victim support services and resources, including through coordinated x-gov communications.
- Ensuring appropriate access to mental health services and sexual assault referral centres.

Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice System

- Stepping up intelligence collection and data sharing to understand the evolving threat picture.
- Supporting role of Family Courts and Cafcass to reduce parental and family conflict and escalation of harm.
- Identifying and addressing pinch points in criminal justice for vulnerable victims, including those who have had their cases delayed by COVID measures.