

Gaps in domestic abuse response to COVID-19

Current Gap	Proposed Mitigation
<p>Insufficient incident data: Whilst we have seen evidence of increases in incidents of domestic abuse in China and Italy during quarantine and self-isolation, we are not yet seeing this emerge here.</p>	<p><i>At this stage we will liaise with helpline providers, the sector and police,</i> to develop understanding of trends and changes in incidents reporting and monitor volume and types of request. This includes calls to helplines as well as to police forces.</p>
<p>Increased demands from the sector: Stakeholders, including the sector, Parliamentarians and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner are requesting additional funding be provided to support the expected increase in incidents. This is on top of existing funding for domestic abuse and helplines.</p>	<p><i>We are working closely with the sector to understand the changes and increases in pressures on their ability to provide support for victims.</i> Once a better picture of the evidence emerges, we can make decisions on where to target additional funding.</p>
<p>Inability to investigate incidents: Police are reporting that perpetrators are using COVID-19 to avoid being charged or follow protection order requirements. Some forces are also reporting lack of information on how to implement/take out DVPNs and DVPOs, highlighting a potential conflict between the coronavirus Bill and DVPOs. There is also an gap in understanding how police will prioritise domestic abuse with increases in staff sickness.</p>	<p><i>Maintain communication with police forces, including the APCC lead for domestic abuse</i> to understand forces' current concerns and to publish and disseminate guidance on the usage of DVPNs and DVPOs during COVID-19. We will also work with APCC lead for domestic abuse to understand contingency plans and how DA cases will be followed up should staff sickness increase.</p>

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<p>Unknown impact on vulnerable victims (eg deaf and disabled, migrant): Isolation may result in vulnerable victims not being able to seek support, especially if they rely on the perpetrator for care or do not speak the language.</p>	<p><i>We are working with deaf and disabled victims charities to understand the impact on these victims and address barriers they face in accessing support.</i> This includes working with them to repurpose Home Office funding to improve support.</p> <p><i>There is also a pilot project to fund migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse.</i> This was intended to be used as part of the handling plan for the Domestic Abuse bill but we could bring it forward if we think the need is urgent.</p>
<p>Unknown ability for refuges to remain open: Whilst £1.6bn of the Budget funding for COVID-19 has been allocated to local authorities to help them increase support for services helping the most vulnerable, and MHCLG have issued guidance for refuges and supported accommodation, there remains concern for their ongoing capacity and resilience.</p>	<p><i>We are working closely with the sector and MHCLG</i> to understand demands on refuges and where additional funding may be needed should continued isolation measures be in place.</p>
<p>Unknown impact on children: We are currently awaiting more granular information on the impact of self-isolation on children who live in abusive households. Given the reduction</p>	<p><i>HO, DfE and MHCLG are working with schools and local authorities to help identify the children who most need support at this time.</i> Schools have been asked to continue ²</p>

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Unknown impact on Domestic Abuse Bill: we currently do not have a date for second reading and the Domestic Abuse Bill may be deprioritised in the current political climate. There is pressure from the sector to maintain momentum and not let it slip too far despite current issues.	Bill managers are continuing to support the Bill's progression. This includes liaising with No10 and other Parliamentary stakeholders to maintain momentum for the Bill and preparing for the Bill's next stage.