

To:

1. Home Secretary
2. Minister for Safeguarding and Vulnerability

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INFORMATION TO NOTE: HIDDEN HARMS - DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE UPDATE

This note provides an update for Ministers on ongoing work to tackle the hidden harms of domestic abuse and child sexual abuse in the context of Covid, following a deep dive with the Minister for Safeguarding on 11 November.

Trends and context

1. Over the period 23 March to September victims' charities reported significant and sustained increases in calls to helplines, with demand starting to decrease by October. Police data has shown some increases in both domestic and child abuse reports although at much lower volumes than the reported calls to charities, potentially indicating that harm continues to go under-reported.
2. **The National Domestic Abuse Helpline received an average of 326 daily calls in the week to 5 October**, lower than the highs seen during the lockdown period (average 450-500 calls per day 60%-70% above normal), but still higher than pre lockdown (average 270 calls per day). **By comparison NPCC data showed a 2% increase in domestic abuse (DA) incidents for the four-week period to 11 October** compared with the same period in 2019. Reporting for four-week periods in June and July were respectively 8% and 6% up on comparable periods the previous year.
3. Similarly, following the £1.6m investment from Government to support a national marketing campaign that ran throughout May, the **NSPCC helpline saw an immediate 40% increase in contacts (concerning all forms of child abuse and neglect) handled by the service, and following this initial surge, levels have remained well above baseline levels.** The proportion of **contacts about sexual abuse (contact) has decreased from 11% pre-lockdown to 9% in September**; although numbers and proportions have increased since

the early days of lockdown further adding to concerns that abuse remains hidden. **Childline also reported an 11% increase in the number of counselling sessions regarding online sexual abuse**, from an average of 207 sessions per month before lockdown to an average of 230 sessions per month since the first period of national restrictions began.

4. However, it continues to be challenging to ascertain the impact of lockdown measures on CSA. Over the last two weeks we have **seen a slight increase in the reporting of Child Sexual Abuse overall, with a 2.9% increase during week ending 1st November and a 0.6% increase in week ending 8th November** when compared to the equivalent four-week period in 2019.
5. **In terms of IIOC, we are continuing to see a decrease in comparison to the equivalent period in 2019, with a decrease of 8.7% week ending 8th November.** We are continuing to see an **increase in the reporting of sexual grooming** and rape and sexual assault figures are almost consistent with the number of reports in 2019. Over the last seven weeks, reports of neglect have also remained almost consistent with 2019 figures.
6. **A significant difference between current and previous COVID-19 measures is that at present schools remain fully open.** This is a critical protective factor for children at risk of a range of harms and it may also provide parents subject to abuse with respite, for example, enabling them to leave home to do school runs, and to continue to go to work where that is an option.

Actions and impacts during Spring national lockdown

Domestic Abuse

7. The HO launched the highly successful **#YouAreNotAlone (YANA) awareness raising campaign** which, by August, had generated over 330 impressions across media outlets. The campaign provided points of contact for victims for a range of types of domestic abuse, including so-called honour-based abuse.
8. **We provided just under £3m of funding via two funding pots to 34 national and regionally based organisations.** This enabled those providing helplines and on-line services to maintain support by shifting to home working, developing online services in place of face-to-face ones and expanding capacity to meet increased requests. We also funded Operation Encompass to establish a teacher advice line to support vulnerable children with school places, and we funded Hestia to establish a helpline for employers. The funding also helped compensate organisations for loss of normal income streams as a