

14 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 **fourth** meeting and attendees are listed below

Helplines

2. **There has been increased demand across all helplines and most support services, with the National Domestic Abuse helpline seeing a 29% increase in calls from the previous week (which itself was an increase in 25% from the week before).** The following key issues were also noted:
 - a. **Changes in call times** - services continue to see more evening calls and many noted a spike over the Easter weekend, in comparison to 'normal' weekends. Many will be seeking funding through £2m announced by the Home Office to increase capacity during these times
 - b. **Web traffic continues to rise across the board** with increases as high as 320% in some cases, and again a spike over the Easter weekend
 - c. **Increase in victims using more discrete forms of technology** to access services, such as instant messaging or emails
 - d. **Notable increase in complex cases and length of calls**, with Galop reporting that average call times had tripled in recent weeks (even where call volumes remained static)
 - e. **Young people have been calling in increased numbers**
 - f. **Distinct rise in child-parent violence** reported by parents isolating with adult and adolescent children who do not usually behave in harmful ways. There are significant concerns over the lack of guidance or support services available for families experiencing this.

Concerning lack of women making enquiries into family court processes on family law helplines when living with the perpetrator. Rights of Women had expected an increase, suggests women may not be aware that the family courts remain open despite COVID-19

- g. **Information and guidance relating to domestic abuse services and support is not being widely translated**, which is making it hard for migrant or deaf women to obtain information.
- h. **Concerns that many women are waiting until lockdown is lifted** to access face-to-face services or report lockdown abuse, necessity of sustaining funding to account for this

- i. **Smaller organisations supporting BAME and disabled women** particularly struggling, need for ring fencing for these services

3. **Other issues The sector welcomed funding commitments made by Government, and it will be crucial for funds to reach those organisations who need it most.** This would need to be flexible, widespread (covering both 2nd tier and small local organisations) as well as be provided quickly to meet the increased demand for support already being seen.
4. **There were significant concerns over plans for funding to be provided via existing commissioning channels, as this could simply exacerbate the ‘post code lottery’ that was already an issue pre-Covid.** There was clear consensus for funding to be allocated to charities directly, rather than through PCCs or Local Authorities, who could continue to miss the smaller grass-roots organisations who are those most desperately in need of support.
5. **MHCLG has released a survey** with the intention of gathering data to support funding applications, stressed that their main focus is obtaining this evidence and keeping refuges open. Timelines and deadlines for funding likely to be available later this week or early next
6. **Concerns about increase in lower-risk incidents reported to police and drop in higher-risk abuse cases,** could mean that people are being prohibited from reporting as these numbers usually remain stable. Police remaining vigilant on these issues, and making concerted effort to ensure there is adequate messaging in public spaces
7. **Concerns about schools and social services not being proactive in identifying vulnerable children and families,** danger of this falling off radar with school closures. Department for Education has noted, will follow up.
8. **Need for coordinated effort across sector to support training of NHS volunteers in domestic abuse issues** -SafeLives suggested compiling basic messaging for volunteers
9. **The sector recognised the strain that smaller organisations in particular were under,** and Government agreed to streamline their communications in order to reduce this, as well as provide as much assistance with funding applications as possible. Government continued to welcome information about key issues and areas, and recognised the essential role that these smaller charities were performing.

Attendees:

Sector: Refuge, Women’s Aid Federation England, Welsh Women’s Aid, Respect, SafeLives, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition, Galop, Imkaan, Rights of Women, Latin American Women Rights Service (as representatives of the Step Up Migrant Women Campaign), IRISi, Surviving Economic Abuse, The Employers’ Initiative.

Government Officials: Association of PCCs, Home Office, DfE, MHCLG, MoJ, DWP, DHSC, Welsh Government, Local Government Association

Victoria Atkins, Minister for Safeguarding and Vulnerability