

(COR0200)

Written evidence submitted by the Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales (COR0200)

Dear Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP,

I welcome the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into the Home Office's preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus) and the specific focus on domestic abuse. I thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to provide oral evidence on 3 February 2021 and provide written evidence (attached) on the key trends and statistics with regards to the pandemic's impact on domestic abuse ahead of the session.

While Covid-19 has not in itself caused domestic abuse, what the very necessary public health measures have done is to create a conducive context for it to happen. For many, this period has led to an escalation of violence and abuse, closed down routes for people to escape safely and made it more challenging to bring perpetrators to justice.

Over the course of the pandemic I have convened regular meetings which have brought together central government departments, the police, domestic abuse services and local government representatives to quickly respond to changing circumstances, share learning and escalate problems at an early stage. At the start of the pandemic these meetings were held each week. They are now held fortnightly.

Ahead of next week's session I wanted to share with the Committee, the key data that has been gathered with regards to the demands for support from victims of domestic abuse over the last couple of months. As part of my written submission I have included the latest data from domestic abuse helpline providers who attend the meetings that I convene to provide the most up to date understanding of the impact of the pandemic on victims of domestic abuse. This data demonstrates both the increase in demand for support through helplines, as well as the increased complexity of cases being responded to. I have also included headline data from the Office of National Statistics' November release on domestic abuse during the pandemic, which covers the period April 2020 - June 2020 and includes data from helplines and police recorded crime. I have also included the latest data pack from the Ministry of Justice's Silver Command meeting on Covid 19 and victims and witnesses. This includes weekly stats on the **demand for helpline and online support services** since the week prior to Covid-19 pandemic lockdown including contextual information from providers, demand for community-based support services for DA and SV victims (Rape Support Fund providers and DA providers funded by PCCs) and refuge provision data,

Yours sincerely

Nicole Jacobs
Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Helplines supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse

National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge

- The following data covers the period running from 1 April until 31 December 2020.
 - For the period 1st April to 31 December 2020 the number of calls and contacts logged on the NDAH database (both incoming and outgoing) increased by 34% on the same period the previous year (114,986 in 2020 vs 85,771 in 2019).
 - The team increased the number of responses to women and their support to people by 22% compared to the same period last year.
 - During this period NDAH advisers made 3,785 referrals to emergency refuge accommodation.
 - Over this period, 72% of calls were made from survivors, 10% from professionals and 11% from third parties. The proportion of calls from third parties were at their highest level during the first national lockdown.
 - The highest call volumes was in May 20 and the lowest in December 20, with higher call volumes during the summer months and during the second national lockdown in England.
 - The new NDAH digital platform which provides information and support for survivors and people who support them received 712,426 visits during this period.
 - Since launching the new live chat service on 5 May, 3,397 live chats have taken place.

The national Live Fear Free Helpline is run by Welsh Women's Aid's (commissioned by Welsh Government)

- The following data covers the period running from the 6th of April until the week commencing the 21st of December.
 - There were a total of 21,186 contacts made over this timeframe (including calls, webchats, texts and emails). The maximum number of contacts made on any month was 2,893 in October, which was followed by 2,780 in June. The minimum number of contacts was 1,997 in November.
 - The vast majority of contacts were made via calls (18,923 calls, 89.3% of all contacts). Although there were also a total of 1,684 webchats (7.9%), 319 texts (1.5%) and 260 emails (1.2%) in the period.
 - There was a 37% increase in average duration of the calls to the Helpline in quarter 1 of 2020/21 (April-June) with 5:02 minutes in quarter 1 2020/21 compared to 3:40 minutes in 2019/20. This trend continued in quarter 2 (July to September) where there was a 23% increase in call duration from 3.56 minutes in quarter 2 2019/20, to 4:50 minutes in 2020/21. Analysis of the calls demonstrates an increase in complexity, severity and diversity which has increased the average call duration. Safeguarding referrals from the Helpline have also increased significantly.

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Galop

- Between April – December 2020/21 the helpline received 5011 calls. This compared to 3679 calls during the same period for the previous year, representing a 36% increase.
- The following data covers the period running from October 2020 to January 2021
 - The volume of contacts from Oct 20 to Jan 21 has remained the same in comparison to July – Sept period, but it's still higher in comparison to the same period from 19/20.

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- The helpline has registered an increase in the complexity of the nature of contacts, which means the helpline team continue to have a work load than is greater than the service's capacity would normally be.
- Before the pandemic callers were mostly looking for understanding, validation and emotional support, now the helpline staff are taking on complex cases where experiences of domestic abuse are compounded by and exacerbated by stress and distress due to continuous lockdowns, increased isolation and worries about housing, income issues, escalating mental health issues and the lack of or limited access to other crucial services of support (e.g. health services).
- The number of formal referrals made this quarter has doubled compared to quarter 2. The helpline also raised ten safeguarding concerns about help seekers; more than 3 times the amount (3) made in the previous quarter.
- The trend of an increase in the number of young people (16-24 year olds) contacting the service also continues. The proportion of help-seekers under 25 remains consistent from last quarter, an over 50% increase on figures for this demographic from 19/20.
- Young LGBT+ people are facing complex risk situations due to the pandemic. Closure of schools, colleges and universities, loss of employment and income means a number of young LGBT+ people had to move back in with their families. Galop clients report increased isolation, not accepting, or hostile family environments. Risk of HBV - harassment, abuse or family rejection, has meant many young LGBT+ people have had to go back into the closet or avoid coming out entirely to their families. Lockdown has also put them in a situation where they no longer have access to their friends, communities and partners.

The Financial Support Line for Victims of Domestic Abuse is run in partnership between Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) and Money Advice Plus.

- The national telephone casework service provided through SEA and MAP's financial support line was reoriented to provide one-off guidance to meet additional demand arising from Covid-19, and saw a 65% increase in calls in the first three months of lockdown #1 (March - May 2020)
- In the 9 months since April 2020, the financial support line responded directly to 409 cases (includes one-off advice, third party advice and new casework) - this is almost double the 212 cases in the 12 months of 2019-20. The service was reoriented to prioritise one-off advice over casework in response to increased demand during Covid and the helpline received Home Office funding to increase the capacity of the service.

Karma Nirvana helpline for victims and survivors of so-called 'honour-based' abuse

- The data in this report compares the number of contacts managed by the helpline between 1 March 2020 and 31 December 2020. Contacts refers to incoming and outgoing calls, and incoming and outgoing emails.
 - The most significant monthly increase in contacts of 79% occurred between March 2020 and May 2020 - 782 to 1399 respectively
 - November proved to be the busiest month on the helpline during the reporting period with a total of 1585 support contacts, compared with 818 support contacts for the same period in 2019 – 94% increase compared with November 2019

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- There has been an overall increase in new referrals to the helpline of 49% between March 2020 and November 2020 – 152 – 227 respectively
- During the reporting period contacts providing on-going support to *existing victims and professionals have increased by 81% - 4402 – 7981 compared with 2019
- During the reporting period the length of incoming calls has increased by 27% - 11 minutes to 14 minutes. Outgoing calls have increased by 50% - 6 minutes to 9 minutes compared with 2019
- Outward bound contacts have increased by 93% - 2285 – 4405 compared with 2019

The Respect helpline for male victims of domestic abuse

The following data covers the period from 1 April until 31 December 2020.

- Between 1 April - 31 December 2020:
 - The number of calls received increased by 39% compared with the same period in 2019 (23,536 in 2020 vs 16,945 in 2019).
 - The number of emails increased by 65% (5,389 in 2020, 3,259 in 2019).
 - The number of webchats increased by 201% (5,851 in 2020, 1,940 in 2019)
 - The number of website visitors increased by 39% (92,843 in 2020, 66,904 in 2019)
- In June 2020, the helpline increased the number of contact hours from 46 to 63 weekly, including a weekend service by email.
- They created an online library with legal information factsheets for male victims wanting to understand their legal rights. This is now one of the most visited pages on the website and the more frequently accessed factsheets are those about non-molestation orders, child arrangement orders and divorce proceedings

Respect Helpline for domestic abuse perpetrators looking for help to stop

The following data covers the period from the 1 April until 31 December 2020.

- Between 1 April to 31 December 2020:
 - the number of calls received increased by 62% compared with the same period in 2019 (5,943 in 2020 vs 3,663 in 2019).
 - The number of emails increased by 86% (1,855 in 2020, 998 in 2019)
 - The number of webchats increased by 270% (2,312 in 2020, 625 in 2019)
- In June 2020, the helpline increased the number of contact hours from 40 to 63 weekly, including a weekend service by email.
- They created two online libraries: one with resources for perpetrators and one for frontline workers. Visitors spend just over 3 minutes on average on the libraries orders, this is significantly higher than the mere seconds most people spend on a webpage, indicating they find the content relevant and useful.

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

- The helpline continues to see peaks and troughs in demand in line with the changes in pandemic measures – after each significant change we have seen a drop in demand, which then increases back to well above 2019 levels.
- The average increase in call volumes since March is +14%, but this also varies hugely. Average demand change throughout Sept was +14%, and in October was +44%, however at some points there has been an increase in demand up 72% more than this time in 2019.
- In October there were 1610 calls and emails to the Helpline. In November there were 998 emails and calls into the Helpline. However, again this has peaks and troughs;

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there was a large spike in demand (27.2% higher than 2019) in mid-December just before the additional measures started being discussed.

- There has now been a drop in demand as we have gone back into lockdown, with an average drop in January so far being 5% lower than 2020.
- Even though demand is slightly down, the average call this January is taking about 16% longer, demonstrating increased complexity of cases and need for more emotional support.

The Office of National Statistics Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020, Indicators from a range of data sources to assess the impact of the coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales (published November 2020) – this covers the period April 2020- June 2020

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

Demand for services

- Between April and June 2020, The 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge's logged a total of 40,397 calls and contacts on its database, a 65% increase compared with the first three months of 2020 (Appendix Table 21). This equates to an average of 444 calls and contacts per day at the height of the pandemic, compared with an average of 270 per day from January to March.
- Refuge also saw a 700% increase in the number of visits to its Helpline website (from 26,320 to 210,620)
- The ManKind Initiative operates a confidential helpline available for all men across the UK suffering from domestic abuse. The total number of calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline each month in 2020 has been consistently higher than the previous year, with the exception of January and May
- There was a particularly large increase (32%) in the total number of calls to the ManKind initiative helpline in June 2020, and demand has remained around this level since then, up until the latest available data for September. This increase appears to mainly be driven by a 38% increase in calls from victims in June 2020 compared with the previous month, while the number of calls on behalf of the victim increased by 16%
- The weekly number of domestic abuse cases handled by Victim Support dipped below the January-March average in the first four weeks of lockdown, but then steadily increased following the easing of lockdown 4 measures in mid-May and has remained above average since then.
- The Live Fear Free helpline (run by Welsh Women's Aid) received a total of 6,041 calls between April and June 2020, an 18% decrease compared with the same period in the previous year (Appendix Table 19). The total number of calls received was lowest in April 2020 (1,916), during the full UK lockdown, and increased slightly in the following two months as lockdown measures began to ease

Police recorded crime

- Looking specifically at the period affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the police recorded 259,324 offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse-related in the period March to June 2020 (Appendix Table 1). This represents a 7% increase from 242,413 in the same period in 2019 and an 18% increase from 218,968 in 2018. As the number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related has been increasing in recent years, it is not possible to determine what impact the coronavirus pandemic may have had on the increases in 2020.
- The number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related increased each month from April to June 2020, with the largest month-on-month increase (9%) between

April and May 2020 (Figure 1). This increase coincides with the easing of lockdown measures from 13 May 2020, when it may have been safer for victims to contact the police.

- The London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) received a total of 41,158 calls-for-service for domestic incidents 1 between 25 March (following the lockdown restrictions imposed on 23 March) and 10 June 2020. This is a 12% increase compared with 36,727 calls over the same period in the previous year. The weekly 2 number of calls from victims remained at similar, sometimes lower levels to the previous year, however, there were large increases in calls from third parties
- In April, May and June roughly one-fifth (21%, 20% and 19%) of all offences recorded by the police were flagged as domestic abuse-related, which represents an increase of around five percentage points compared with the same period in previous years (Appendix Table 2). As the lockdown measures eased, the proportion of all offences that were domestic abuse-related decreased slightly. This is likely because of the overall reduction in police recorded crime during the lockdown period, particularly in April, followed by increases in police recorded crime as lockdown measures eased.
- The police recorded 206,492 violence against the person offences flagged as domestic abuse-related between March and June 2020, a 9% increase compared with the same period in 2019 (Figure 2). The number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related in this period increased for all offence groups compared with the previous year, with the exception of sexual offences and other offences, which decreased by 3% and 6% respectively.
- Provisional data show there were 64 domestic homicides recorded by the police in England and Wales between 3 January and June 2020, of which 30 occurred in the period April to June (Appendix Table 3). This represents an increase in the number of domestic homicides recorded by the police compared with the same six-month period in the previous year (55), but a slight decrease compared with 2018 (67).

Police Arrests

- HMICFRS collects data from police forces on arrests and voluntary attendances for domestic abuse-related 1 2 crimes (Appendix Table 4). The data show that between 1 April and 30 June 2020: the police made 64,283 arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes (in the 40 police forces that could supply adequate data) there were 3,242 instances of voluntary attendance (among the 29 forces able to supply adequate data) of 27 The total number of arrests and instances of voluntary attendance between 1 April and 30 June of 2019 and 2020 were compared for police forces that supplied data for both time periods.
- The number of arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes between 1 April and 30 June 2020 increased by 24% compared with the same period in the previous year (from 49,534 to 61,275 in the 37 police forces that could supply adequate data for both periods). This follows a 11% increase in the number of arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes in the year ending March 2020, compared with the previous year (in the 38 police forces that supplied data in both years). In contrast, the number of instances of voluntary attendance decreased by 35% between 1 April and 30 June of 2019 and 2020 (from 4,756 to 3,106), in the 26 police forces that supplied adequate data for both periods.

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January 2021