Office for National Statistics

Article

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 (COVID-19) pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.

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Table of contents

1. Main points

2. Coronavirus and measuring domestic abuse

3. Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW)

4. Police recorded crime

5. Police responses to domestic abuse

6. Domestic violence remedy orders

7. Calls-for-service for domestic abuse incidents

8. Domestic abuse victim services

9. Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic data

10. Glossary

11. Data sources and quality

12. Related links

1 . Main points

- Police recorded crime data show an increase in offences flagged as domestic abuse-related during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, however, there has been a gradual increase in police recorded domestic abuse-related offences over recent years as police have improved their recording of these offences; therefore it cannot be determined whether this increase can be directly attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.

- The number of domestic violence remedy orders shows a mixed picture; the weekly number of non-molestation applications, and the number of orders granted from mid-April to the end of June were above the pre-lockdown baseline, while the weekly number of occupation orders granted between March and the end of June were generally below the pre-lockdown baseline.

- London's Metropolitan police service received an increased number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents following the lockdown, largely driven by third-party calls; this is likely because people were spending more time at home during this period.

- There has generally been an increase in demand for domestic abuse victim services during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly affecting helplines as lockdown measures eased; this does not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of victims, but perhaps an increase in the severity of abuse being experienced, and a lack of available coping mechanisms such as the ability to leave the home to escape the abuse, or attend counselling.

- The total number of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) decreased in April to June 2020 compared with the previous quarter; this may reflect the difficulties high-risk victims faced when attempting to safely contact the police (the main source of referral to MARACs) during the lockdown period.

2 . Coronavirus and measuring domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced. Many cases will not enter the criminal justice process as they are not reported to the police.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, lockdown restrictions came into effect from 23 March 2020 and imposed strict limits on daily life. This publication presents data on domestic abuse from April 2020 onwards using a range of sources to assess the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales. Data presented from each source cover additional reference periods to enable comparison with pre-lockdown months where possible.

The data included in this publication are not directly comparable because they are collected on different bases (for example, victims, crimes, suspects or defendants) and different timescales and reference periods are used to collect the data. Cases may also drop out at any stage of the process.

Further information on the data sources used in this publication can be found in Data sources and quality.

3 . Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW)

The preferred measure of domestic abuse, collected through the self-completion module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), is not currently available, as face-to-face interviews were suspended on 17 March 2020. We designed a new survey to be conducted via telephone to continue measuring crime during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period and while face-to-face interviews are not possible.

Concerns around confidentiality and respondent safeguarding limited the types of questions asked in the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW). This included those relating to domestic abuse. However, some limited data on domestic violence are collected via the TCSEW. These data are likely to be affected by similar limitations to the face-to-face domestic violence measure (for example, victims underreporting experiences of domestic violence when asked by an interviewer) and so findings will need to be interpreted with caution.

Of those respondents interviewed in the TCSEW in July and August 2020, fewer than 10 reported experiencing incidents of domestic violence between April and June 2020. Because of the smaller sample size for the TCSEW and the associated levels of uncertainty in the estimates, we are unable to publish estimates on domestic violence for the period from April 2020 onwards at this time.

4 . Police recorded crime

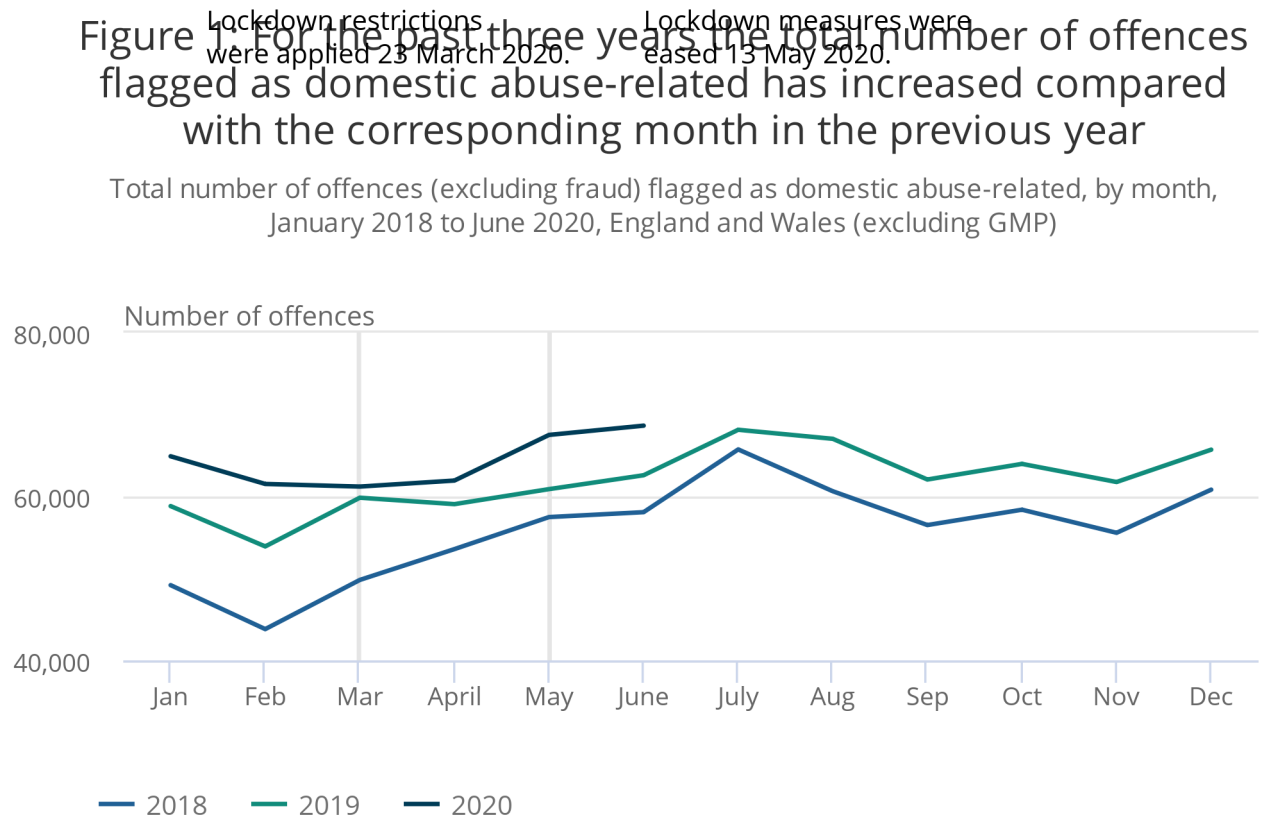
With the exception of controlling or coercive behaviour, domestic abuse is not a specific criminal offence. Offences that are domestic abuse-related will be recorded under the respective offence that has been committed, for example, assault with injury. However, the police are required to flag when an offence is domestic abuse-related.

The latest data available for the number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police (GMP))[1] are for June 2020, and therefore comparisons are made for the period March to June each year. The data referred to in this publication are provisional.

For the last three years, the total number of offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse-related each month has increased compared with the corresponding month of the previous year (Figure 1). Some of this increase may be, in part, driven by police improvements in offence-recording practices, as well as an increase in domestic abuse-related crimes coming to the attention of the police. The increase could also indicate an increased willingness of victims to come forward to report domestic abuse[2].

Figure 1: For the past three years the total number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related has increased compared with the corresponding month in the previous year

Total number of offences (excluding fraud) flagged as domestic abuse-related, by month, January 2018 to June 2020, England and Wales (excluding GMP)



Source: Home Office – Police recorded crime

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. April 2020 to June 2020 data are provisional and have not been fully reconciled with police forces.
3. Data for Greater Manchester Police (GMP) on domestic abuse-related offences are not included in this publication because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

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.

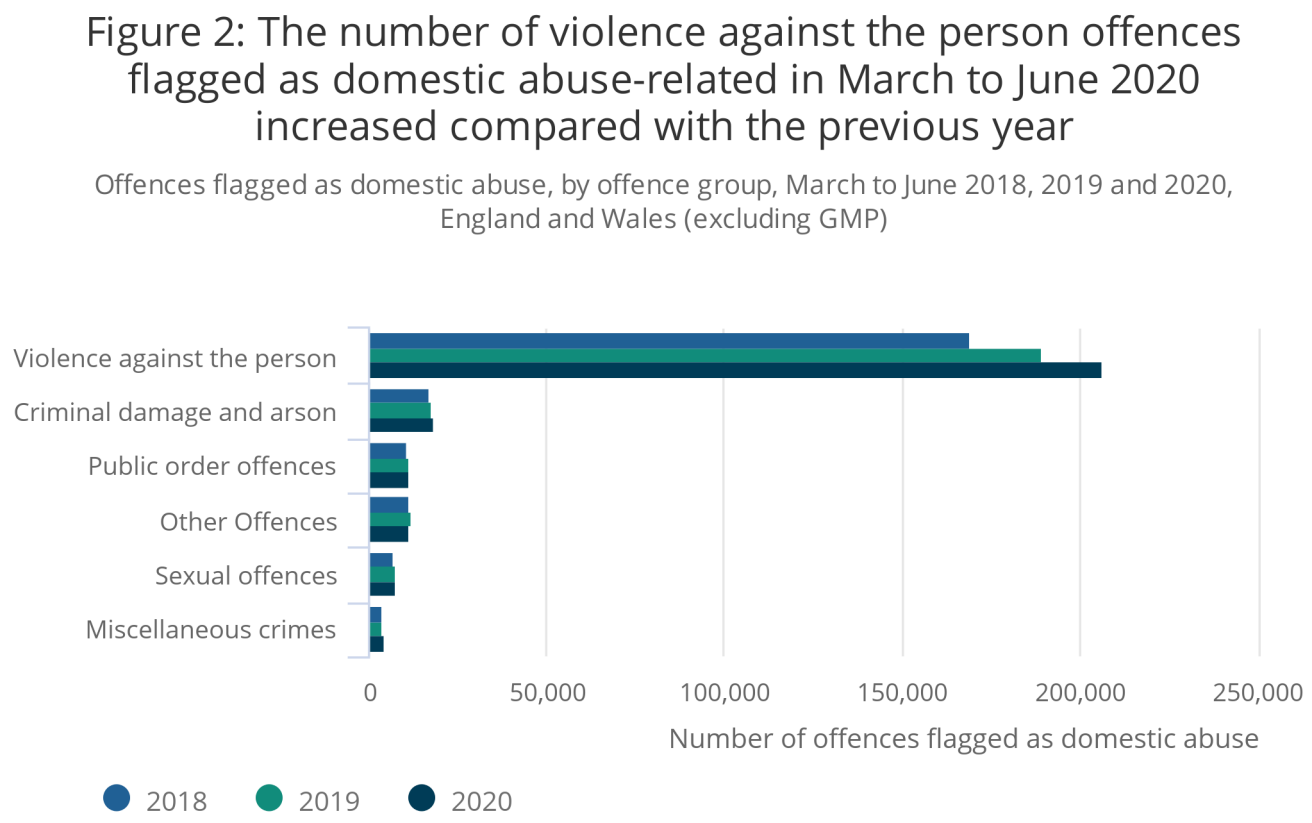
The number of offences flagged as domestic abuse-related increased each month from April to June 2020, with the largest month-on-month increase (9%) between April and May 2020 (Figure 1). This increase coincides with the easing of lockdown measures from 13 May 2020, when it may have been safer for victims to contact the police.

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.

Figure 2: The number of violence against the person offences flagged as domestic abuse-related in March to June 2020 increased compared with the previous year

Offences flagged as domestic abuse, by offence group, March to June 2018, 2019 and 2020, England and Wales (excluding GMP)



Source: Home Office – Police recorded crime

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. April 2020 to June 2020 data are provisional and have not been fully reconciled with police forces.
3. Data for Greater Manchester Police (GMP) on domestic abuse-related offences are not included in this publication because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

Domestic homicide

Provisional data[3] show there were 64 domestic homicides recorded by the police in England and Wales between 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).

Notes for: Police recorded crime

1. Data for Greater Manchester Police on domestic abuse-related offences are not included in this publication because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

2. Once every three years, the Crime Survey for England and Wales asks further questions on the circumstance of partner abuse experienced. The latest figures showed no significant difference in the total proportion of victims of partner abuse who told the police about the abuse they experienced in the year ending March 2018 compared with the year ending March 2015. However, these figures do not represent all victims of domestic abuse. We are planning a full review of the domestic abuse questions in the Crime Survey. This will consider how we can ask victims of domestic abuse about who they reported their experience to.

3. The data are provisional as at 24 August 2020 and figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

5 . Police responses to domestic abuse

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) visits each police force in England and Wales to examine how effective they are at reducing crime, protecting vulnerable people from harm, and supporting victims. As part of this inspection process, HMICFRS examines police responses to domestic abuse-related crimes.

Caution should be taken when using the data in this section as HMICFRS have expressed concerns about the quality of data provided by some police forces.

Arrests and voluntary attendances for domestic abuse-related crimes

HMICFRS collects data from police forces[1] on arrests and voluntary attendances[2] for domestic abuse-related 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)

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.

Domestic violence protection notices and orders

HMICFRS collects data on domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) and domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs).

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence. This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively prevent the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

A total of 26 forces provided data on both the number of DVPNs applied for and the number granted by a superintendent between 1 April and 30 June 2020. For these forces, 91% of DVPNs applied for were granted (1,628 out of 1,797 applications, Appendix Table 5). This compares with 75% of DVPN applications that were granted by a superintendent in the year ending March 2020 (based on 25 police forces that supplied adequate data, Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system – Appendix Table 2).

DVPOs are civil orders that provide protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates' courts to put in place protective measures in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident. DVPOs are often used where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions. Whereas DVPNs can be approved by a police superintendent, DVPOs are granted by a magistrate.

A total of 36 forces provided data on both the number of DVPOs applied for and the number granted by a magistrates' court between 1 April and 30 June 2020. For these forces, 88% of DVPOs applied for were granted (1,657 out of the 1,873 applications, Appendix Table 5). This is similar to 91% of DVPO applications that were granted by a magistrates' court in the year ending March 2020 (based on 37 police forces that supplied adequate data, Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system – Appendix Table 2).

Domestic violence disclosure scheme

HMICFRS collects data on requests from the domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS, commonly known as Clare's Law[3]). The DVDS sets out procedures for the police to use in relation to disclosure of information to protect an individual whose current partner has a history of domestic violence and abuse.

The DVDS has two routes:

- "right to ask" – this enables someone to ask the police about a partner's history of domestic violence or violent acts
- "right to know" – the police can proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances

A total of 40 police forces provided data on “right to ask” applications and disclosures between 1 April and 30 June 2020 (Appendix Table 5). For these forces, 38% of the “right to ask” applications resulted in disclosures (1,285 out of 3,377). This is a similar proportion to the year ending March 2020 for which 37% of “right to ask” applications resulted in disclosures (based on 42 police forces that supplied adequate data, Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system – Appendix Table 2).

A total of 40 police forces provided data on “right to know” applications and disclosures (Appendix Table 5). For these forces, 53% of the “right to know” applications resulted in disclosures (1,375 out of 2,618). This is a similar proportion to the year ending March 2020 for which 52% of “right to ask” applications resulted in disclosures (based on 41 police forces that supplied adequate data, Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system – Appendix Table 2).

Applications will not result in disclosure if there is no information to disclose.

Child protection referrals from domestic abuse incidents

The National Policing Improvement Agency's guidance on investigating domestic abuse (PDF, 1.6MB) states that police officers should investigate the welfare of all children who have witnessed domestic abuse or who are normally resident at an address at which a domestic abuse-related incident has been reported.

Data from HMICFRS show that there were 56,945 child protection referrals as a result of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes between 1 April and 30 June 2020 (Appendix Table 4)[4]. This figure is based on data supplied by 33 police forces in England and Wales.

For comparison purposes, the total number of child protection referrals between 1 April and 30 June of 2019 and 2020 are compared, where police forces have been able to supply data for both time periods. The number of child protection referrals as a result of domestic abuse-related incidents between 1 April and 30 June 2020 decreased by 2% compared with the same period in the previous year (from 53,804 to 52,641) based on data supplied by 29 police forces.

Notes for: Police responses to domestic abuse

1. Not all police forces are covered because not every force could provide the data.
2. Voluntary attendances act as an alternative to arrest where the suspect attends a police station voluntarily to assist with investigation.
3. This initiative was named after Clare Wood who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend in 2009, who unbeknown to her had a record of violence against women.
4. Multiple child protection referrals can be made for each domestic abuse-related incident or crime recorded by the police. Therefore, it is not possible to link the number of child protection referrals to the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded.

6 . Domestic violence remedy orders

The family courts can grant two types of remedy orders to prevent domestic violence:

- a non-molestation order, which can either prohibit particular behaviour or general molestation by someone who has previously been violent towards the applicant and/or any relevant children

- an occupation order, which can define or regulate rights of occupation of the home by the parties involved

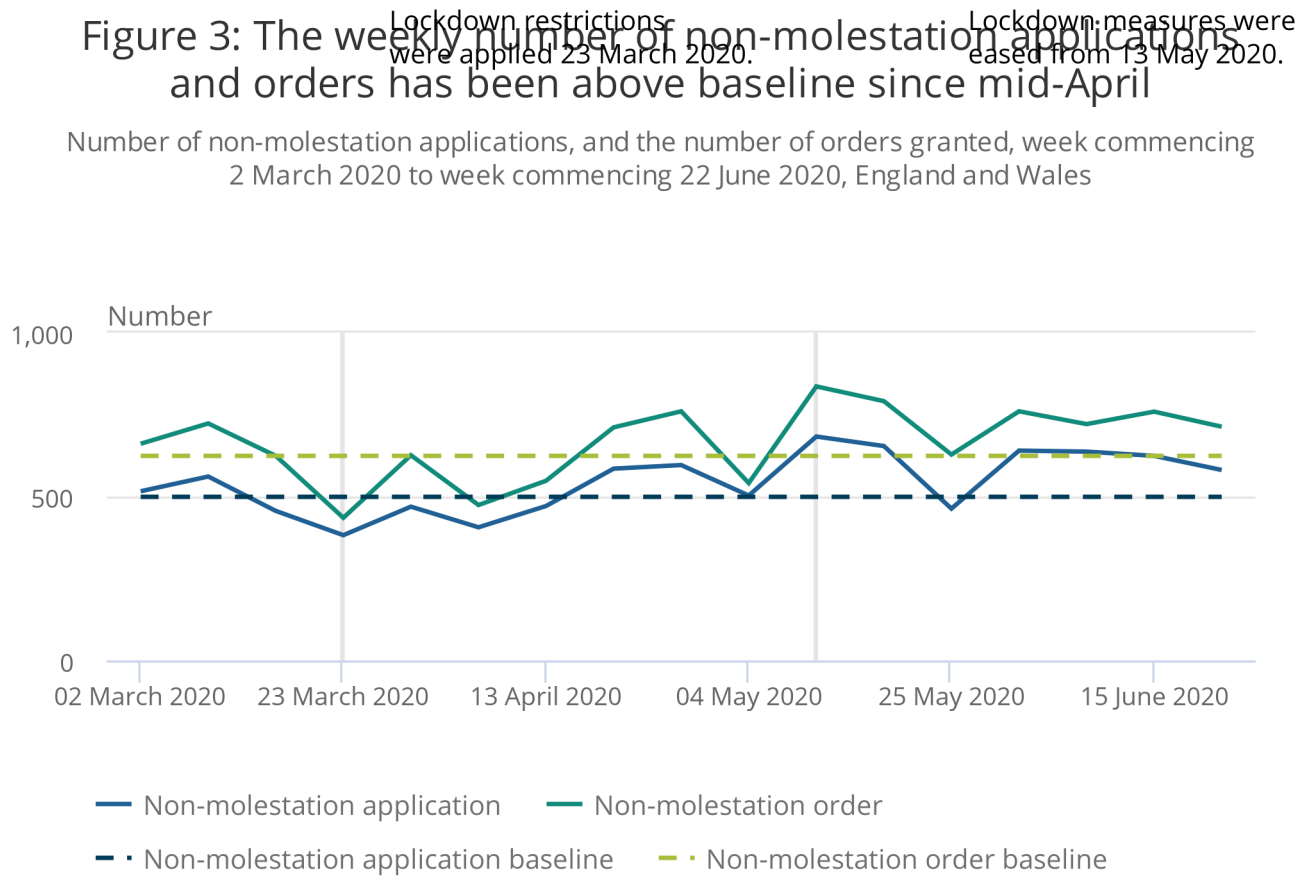
The number of non-molestation applications has increased each year since the year ending March 2013 (Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system - Appendix Table 18). Similarly, the number of non-molestation orders has increased by 40% in the last 10 years[1].

From mid-March to mid-April 2020 the number of non-molestation applications per week were consistently below the pre-lockdown baseline[2] (499) but have since increased to above baseline (Figure 3). The week commencing 11 May saw the highest weekly number of non-molestation applications over this period, reaching 683 (Appendix Table 6). The number of non-molestation orders granted per week shows a similar trend, with the highest weekly number of orders (836) granted in the week commencing 11 May. The peak in the number of non-molestation applications and orders coincides with the week that the lockdown measures began to ease on 13 May 2020.

Non-molestation orders are treated as high priority by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), as they were before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The guidance includes a requirement for applications to be referred to a judge within three hours of receipt and for orders to be provided to the applicant's solicitor on the day they are made.

Figure 3: The weekly number of non-molestation applications and orders has been above baseline since mid-April

Number of non-molestation applications, and the number of orders granted, week commencing 2 March 2020 to week commencing 22 June 2020, England and Wales



Source: HMCTS FamilyMan system

Notes:

1. The baseline figure is a weekly average from the week commencing 2 September 2019 to week commencing 24 February 2020 inclusive. This includes two weeks over Christmas when the totals are significantly lower.

2. It is not possible to compare across applications and orders, because they do not refer to the same cohort of cases.

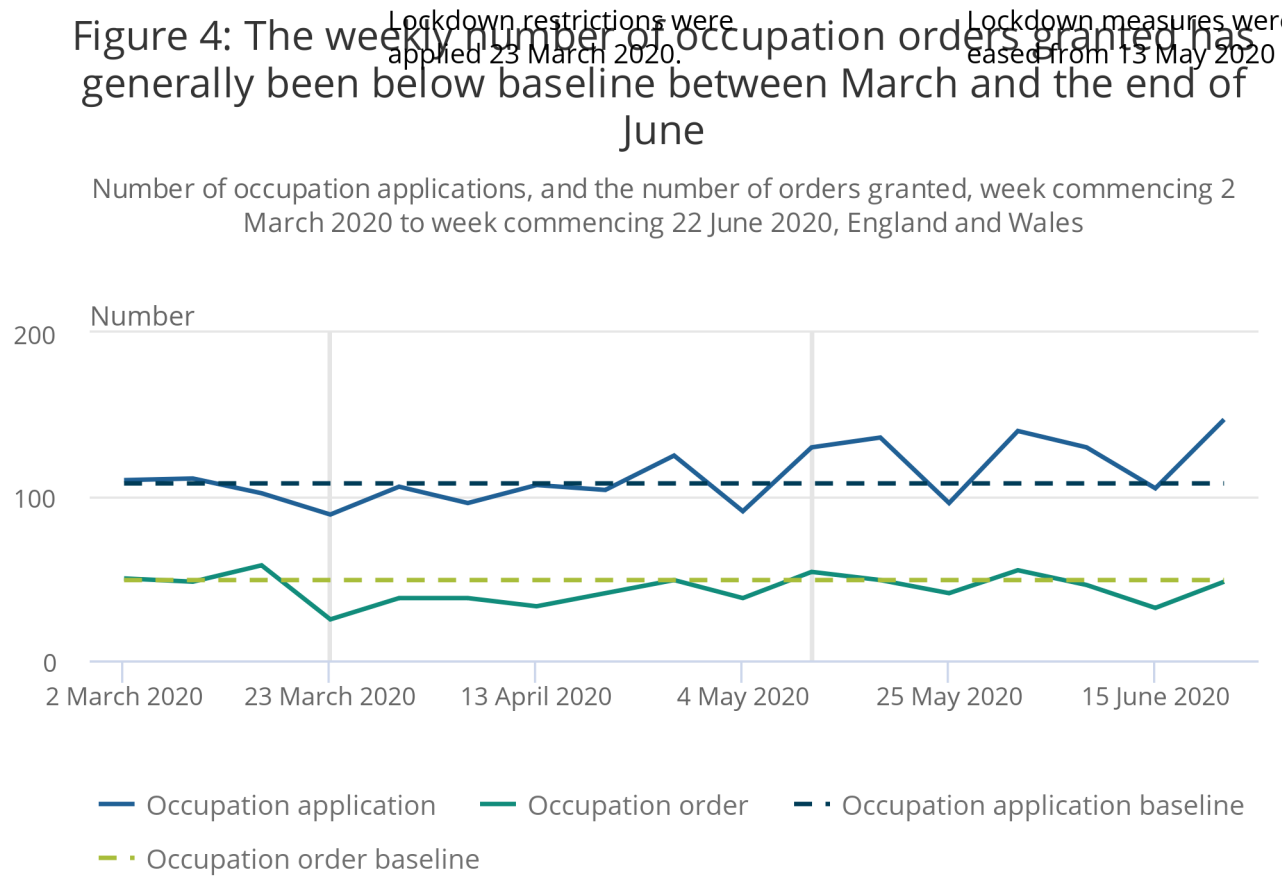
3. Some fluctuations in the number of applications and orders processed in certain weeks may be due to when public holidays fell. The bank holidays in 2020 were 10 April, 13 April, 8 May and 25 May.

The annual number of occupation applications and orders have declining over the last 10 years, by 23% and 42% respectively from the year ending March 2010 compared with the year ending March 2020 (Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system - Appendix Table 18).

The number of occupation applications was consistently below baseline from mid-March to mid-April (Figure 4) but has since fluctuated above and below baseline (108). Meanwhile the number of occupation orders that were granted has been below the pre-lockdown baseline (49) almost every week between March and June, ranging from 25 to 58 per week (Appendix Table 6).

Figure 4: The weekly number of occupation orders granted has generally been below baseline between March and the end of June

Number of occupation applications, and the number of orders granted, week commencing 2 March 2020 to week commencing 22 June 2020, England and Wales



Source: HMCTS FamilyMan system

Notes:

1. The baseline figure is a weekly average from the week commencing 2nd September 2019 to week commencing 24 February 2020 inclusive. This includes two weeks over Christmas when the totals are significantly lower.

2. It is not possible to compare across applications and orders, because they do not refer to the same cohort of cases.

3. Some fluctuations in the number of applications and orders processed in certain weeks may be due to when public holidays fell. The bank holidays in 2020 were 10 April, 13 April, 8 May and 25 May.

Notes for: Domestic violence remedy orders

1. It is not possible to compare across applications and orders, because they do not refer to the same cohort of cases.

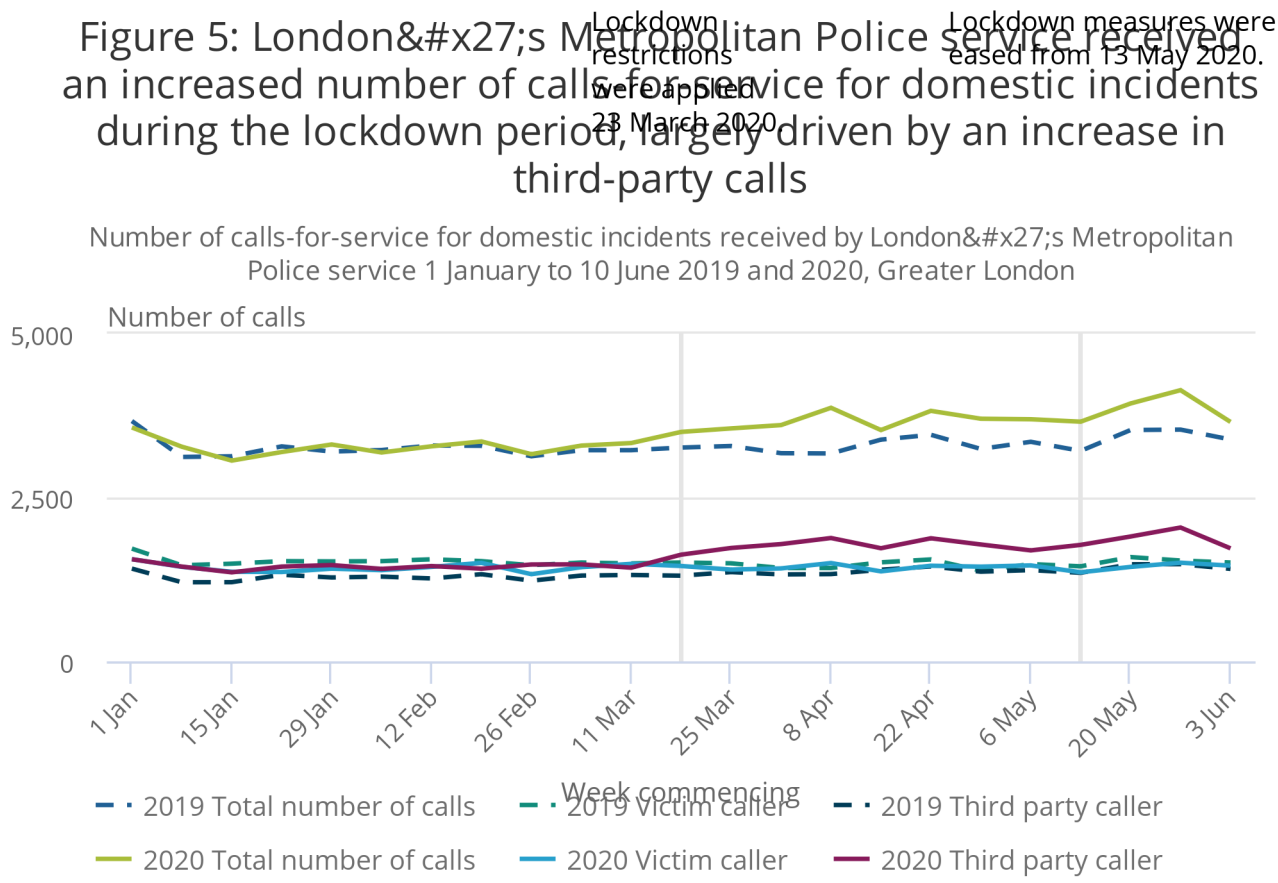
2. The baseline figure is a weekly average from the week commencing 2 September 2019 to week commencing 24 February 2020 inclusive. This includes two weeks over Christmas when the totals are significantly lower.

7 . Calls-for-service for domestic abuse incidents

The London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) received a total of 41,158 calls-for-service[1] for domestic incidents between 25 March (following the lockdown restrictions imposed on 23 March) and 10 June 2020 (Appendix Table 7)[2]. This is a 12% increase compared with 36,727 calls over the same period in the previous year. The weekly 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 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: London's Metropolitan Police service received an increased number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents during the lockdown period, largely driven by an increase in third-party calls

Number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents received by London's Metropolitan Police service 1 January to 10 June 2019 and 2020, Greater London



Source: London School of Economics – Changing patterns of domestic abuse during COVID-19 lockdown

Notes:

1. Calls-for-service for domestic incidents data covering the period 1 January to 10 June 2020, provided by London's Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) the territorial police force responsible for law enforcement in Greater London, which covers a population of around 9 million people.

2. The total number of calls within this chart is greater than the sum of victim calls and third-party calls, as other caller types, such as witness, are included in the total.

The increase in third-party calls can be understood in the context of lockdown, where more people who may not usually be at home would be in close proximity and therefore have greater opportunity to observe and report the abuse. The targeted #YouAreNotAlone media campaign launched in April 2020 may also have increased awareness of domestic abuse, and therefore the likelihood of members of the public being vigilant of it. In contrast, victims who were confined to their homes in close proximity to their perpetrator would have had less opportunity to safely report their abuse.

Notes for: Calls-for-service for domestic abuse incidents

1. Calls-for-service relate to the fields of the police, fire department and emergency medical services. This generally includes calls to “999” for emergency assistance and may also include calls to non-emergency numbers such as “111”.

2. Full analysis of these data, alongside MPS crime records is available in a paper written by London School of Economics: Changing patterns of domestic abuse during Covid-19 lockdown.

8 . Domestic abuse victim services

This section draws on data sourced from a range of organisations that provide support services for victims of domestic abuse, to provide insight into the effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on victims of domestic abuse, and the services supporting them.

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on victims of domestic abuse

Women’s Aid England utilised their existing sources (Routes to Support[1] and On Track[2]) and drew data from five specifically designed surveys to look at how the coronavirus pandemic has affected victims of domestic abuse in England[3]. While the sample size for these surveys was relatively small, the data provide an insight into the impact of the pandemic as reported by the victims themselves.

Of the 69 victims answering the June Survivor Survey, who were currently experiencing abuse, 52% felt the pandemic had had a bad effect on their mental health and that they were less able to cope with the abuse (Appendix Table 9). A large proportion of these victims (91%) said the pandemic had impacted their experiences of abuse in one or more ways, where 58% said they felt they had no one to turn to for help, 52% felt more afraid and 51% reported that the violence and/or abuse had got worse (Appendix Table 8).

Of the 32 women currently experiencing abuse who had children, 53% reported that their children had witnessed more abuse towards them, and 50% were scared that their children would be left alone with the abuser if they were to get ill (Appendix Table 14). When asked about their plans post-lockdown, 46% of women who were currently experiencing abuse showed an intention to leave or seek support (Appendix Table 13).

For the 184 women who had experienced abuse in the past, 53% reported that the pandemic had triggered memories of their abuse and affected their mental health, and 23% felt more afraid (Appendix Table 10). Of the 183 women who had experienced abuse in the past, and had children, 47% were scared their children would be left alone with the abuser if they got ill, and 39% were scared there would be no one to look after their children if they got ill (Appendix Table 14). When asked about their plans post-lockdown, 23% of women who had experienced abuse in the past showed an intention to leave or seek support (Appendix Table 13).

In terms of the ways in which perpetrators used the pandemic as a tool for abuse, 38% of the 69 women answering the June Survivor Survey reported that their perpetrator refused to take precautions to stop the spread of the virus, which put them in danger, and 10% reported that their perpetrator used lockdown restrictions to try to stop them leaving, or made them follow very strict isolation rules (Appendix Table 11). Furthermore, 38% of the 167 women with child contact arrangements reported that the child contact arrangements had been used to further abuse (Appendix Table 15).

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on demand for domestic abuse support services

Of the 236 women responding to Women's Aid England's June Survivor Survey, 59% reported accessing at least one support avenue (Appendix Table 12), the most common being friends or family (34%), followed by looking on the Women's Aid website (23%) and accessing support from a counsellor or therapist (19%).

The June provider survey showed there had been an increase in demand for different types of support service during the pandemic. Of the 26 refuge services responding to the question about demand, 58% reported an increase in demand, and 80% of the 30 community-based services responding to the question reported increased demand (Appendix Table 16). Similarly, 91% of online support services and 81% of telephone support services reported an increase in demand.

It was also largely expected that demand would increase after lockdown measures eased, as it may be easier for victims to seek help without alerting their perpetrator, with 73% of services expecting an increase in demand in the next six months, and 63% expecting an increase in demand between six months (from June 2020) and a year from now (Appendix Table 17).

Data from Welsh Women's Aid showed that the total number of survivors supported by refuge services in Wales in April to June 2020 decreased by 8% compared with same period in 2019 (Appendix Table 20). However, this decrease coincided with a 15% increase in the number of survivors not able to be supported by the service and a 10% increase in the number of those who did not accept support from the service.

This reflects the difficulties faced by refuge services during the pandemic, including the need to protect the health of vulnerable survivors already in the service, some of which may be self-isolating, alongside the need for additional personal protection equipment (PPE) and the deep cleaning of communal and refuge spaces before a new survivor could be accommodated.

Similarly, the total number of survivors supported by sexual violence services during this period decreased by 12% compared with the previous year, while there was a 13% increase in the number of survivors on the waiting list at the end of the period. This reflects the issues faced by sexual violence support services during the pandemic, who have needed to adapt the support they offer to protect the health of survivors, for example, introducing online and socially distanced counselling options.

There were large increases in demand for community services in Wales between April and June 2020, with a 41% increase in the number of survivors supported, a 59% increase in the number of new referrals, and a 143% increase in the number of survivors on the waiting list at the end of the period, compared with the previous year. The increase in support offered by community services suggests they may not have been as affected by the same issues as refuge and sexual violence services.

Welsh Women's Aid also ran two separate surveys in April and June 2020 to gather information from organisations offering support services in Wales (Appendix Table 18). Responses to the June survey, covering the period 16 April to 7 July 2020, indicated that during the lockdown:

- 13 of 15 organisations experienced an increase in demand for online support
- 9 of 15 organisations experienced an increase in demand for communications and/or information services
- 3 of 14 organisations experienced an increase in demand for financial abuse support
- 7 of 14 organisations experienced an increase in demand for child contact cases support

However, none of the 12 organisations experienced an increase in demand for bail and/or domestic violence protection order (DVPO) support, and 10 said demand for these services had remained the same. Responses to the April survey, covering the first three weeks of the lockdown, showed a similar story (Appendix Table 18).

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on domestic abuse helplines

The increase in demand for support services is mirrored in the helpline data provided by the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, ManKind Initiative, and Live Fear Free Helpline.

The 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, provides emotional and practical support to women experiencing domestic abuse, as well as to concerned family, friends and professionals. Refuge introduced a live chat service in May 2020, so women trapped at home with their perpetrators during lockdown had one more way to communicate with them.

Between April and June 2020, Refuge's Helpline team 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.

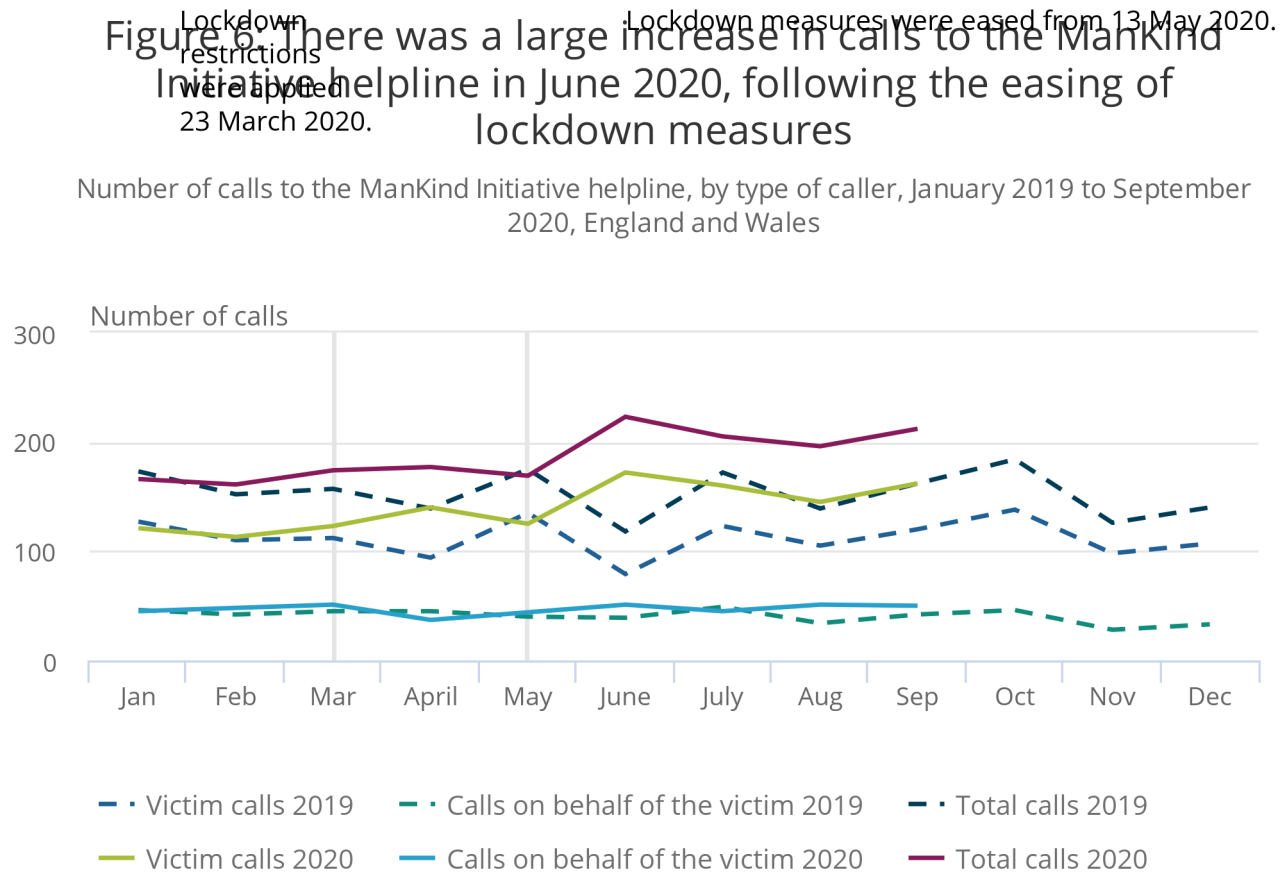
Refuge also saw a 700% increase in the number of visits to its Helpline website (from 26,320 to 210,620), which holds information on recognising domestic abuse, safety planning and women's rights and options (Appendix Table 21).

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 (Appendix Table 22). This suggests that demand for the helpline may have been higher than the previous year, even before the coronavirus pandemic.

However, 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% (Figure 6).

Figure 6: There was a large increase in calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline in June 2020, following the easing of lockdown measures

Number of calls to the ManKind Initiative helpline, by type of caller, January 2019 to September 2020, England and Wales



Source: ManKind Initiative - ManKind Initiative Helpline

Notes:

1. ManKind Initiative data are not classified as official statistics.

In April, June and August 2020, the total number of calls from victims of domestic abuse exceeded the overall total number of calls the helpline received in the corresponding month of the previous year. The increases in calls to the helpline from June 2020 onwards follow the easing of lockdown measures from 13 May 2020, after which it may have been easier for victims who had been confined to their homes to seek help without alerting their perpetrator.

The increase in calls to helplines does not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of victims of domestic abuse, but perhaps an increase in the severity of abuse being experienced, combined with a lack of availability of usual coping mechanisms such as the ability to leave the home to escape the abuse, or attend counselling sessions.

The number of visits to the ManKind Initiative website between April and September 2020 has been consistently higher than the previous year and peaked at 16,693 in May 2020 (Appendix Table 23). This follows the targeted #YouAreNotAlone media campaign launched in April 2020, which may have resulted in an increase in people visiting domestic abuse victim service websites. The increased number of website visits does not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of victims of domestic abuse, but may also reflect an increase in the number of people seeking to learn how to spot signs of domestic abuse, or how to support victims.

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.

In contrast, the helpline saw a 66% increase in emails (from 53 to 88), a 10% increase in web chats (from 578 to 635), and a 780% increase in texts (from 15 to 132) compared with the same period in the previous year. Overall, this translates to a 14% decrease in the number of victim interactions with the helpline between April and June 2020 compared with the previous year. This may reflect the difficulties victims faced trying to safely seek help during the lockdown, with increasing numbers of victims making use of non-verbal forms of communication with the helpline.

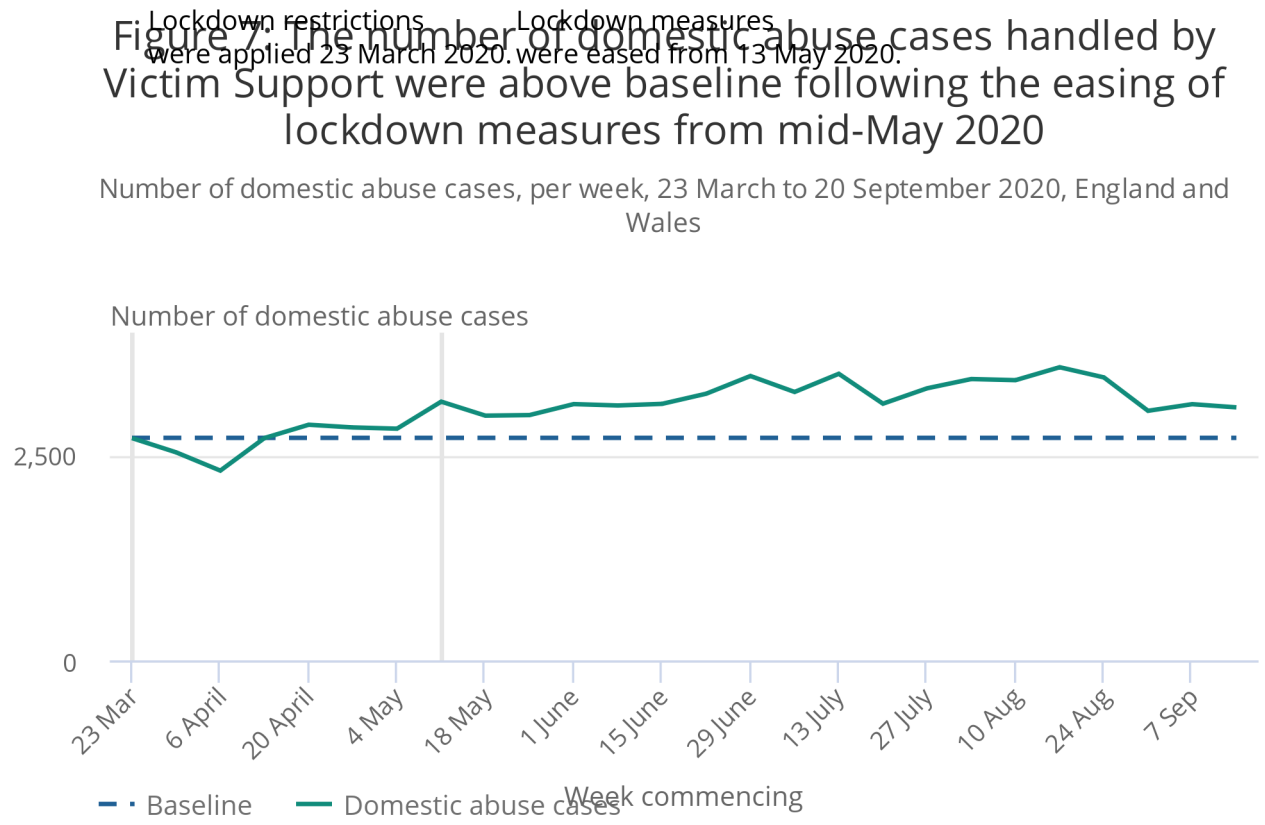
Welsh Women's Aid's analysis of the calls showed an increase in complexity, severity and diversity, which increased the average call duration during this period. They have also reported that safeguarding referrals from the helpline have increased.

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the number of domestic abuse cases handled by Victim Support

The weekly number of domestic abuse cases handled by Victim Support dipped below the January-March average[4] in the first four weeks of lockdown, but then steadily increased following the easing of lockdown measures in mid-May and has remained above average since then (Figure 7, Appendix Table 24).

Figure 7: The number of domestic abuse cases handled by Victim Support were above baseline following the easing of lockdown measures from mid-May 2020

Number of domestic abuse cases, per week, 23 March to 20 September 2020, England and Wales



Source: Victim Support

Notes:

1. Victim Support data are not classified as official statistics.
2. The baseline is the average number of cases received per week in the eight-week period, 6 January 2020 to 1 March 2020.
3. The number of cases represents the number of victim referrals around domestic abuse who are eligible to be contacted by Victim Support services.

This pattern is similar to that seen for domestic abuse helplines, suggesting that perhaps more victims sought support after lockdown measures were eased, when it may have been safer for them to do so.

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk [5] domestic abuse cases between representatives from a range of agencies. After sharing all relevant information about the circumstances for a particular victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the victim's safety and turn these into a coordinated action plan.

SafeLives collects data on the details of cases discussed at MARACs. In recent years, the number of cases discussed at MARACs has been increasing, and this coincides with an increasing percentage of cases that were repeat referrals (Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales - Table 2).

Continuing this trend, in the year ending June 2020, 100,813 cases were discussed at MARACs, a 6% increase from 95,063 in the previous year. This equates to 43.6 cases per 10,000 adult females in the year ending June 2020, an increase from 41.0 cases per 10,000 adult females in the previous year (Appendix Table 25).

Looking at quarterly trends gives a clearer picture of the impact of the pandemic on MARACs. For each of the last five years, the number of cases discussed at MARACs each quarter has increased compared with the previous quarter, with the exception of the October to December quarter where the number of cases has decreased. This is likely because there are fewer meetings over the festive period.

However, for the first time in five years, there was a decrease (0.6%) in the overall number of cases discussed at MARACs in April to June 2020 compared with the previous quarter (Appendix Table 26). This suggests that fewer cases than usual were referred to MARACs during lockdown. With police being the main source of referrals to MARACs, this decrease in referrals may, in part, reflect the difficulties high-risk victims faced when attempting to safely contact the police during the lockdown period.

This decrease in the total number of cases discussed at MARACs during the lockdown is also supported by results from the survey SafeLives sent to each MARAC in England and Wales from the 21 April 2020 until 10 June 2020.

Of the 124 number of MARACs in England and Wales responding to the SafeLives survey, 37% reported that the number of referrals had decreased during this period (Appendix Table 27). Around half of MARACs reported that the number of repeat referrals and serial perpetrators being discussed had stayed the same (52% and 56% respectively). While MARACs are usually face-to-face meetings, most are now being run through teleconference during the pandemic and most (79%) of the 111 MARACs responding, reported that the frequency that MARACs were being run had stayed the same.

Notes for: Domestic abuse victim services

1. Routes to Support is the UK-Wide directory of violence against women and girls services, run in partnership by Women's Aid Federation of England, Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid.

2. The Women's Aid outcomes monitoring and case management system used by local domestic abuse services. These data are taken from 70 organisations who ran refuge and/or community-based support services in May 2020.

3. Findings, and a detailed methodology of Women's Aid surveys is summarised in their A Perfect Storm report, in which data cover the period from the start of lockdown measures in March 2020 to the closure of their June and July 2020 surveys.

4. The average weekly number of cases between 6 January and 1 March 2020.

5. Victims at high risk of domestic abuse are those at risk of serious harm or murder. High risk domestic abuse is defined by either 10 or more ticks on the Dash RIC, based on professional judgement or an escalation in the severity and/or frequency of incidents.

9 . Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic data

Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic – Appendix tables
Dataset | Released 25 November 2020
Indicators from a range of data sources to assess the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.

10 . Glossary

Child protection referrals

The National Policing Improvement Agency's Guidance on investigating domestic abuse (PDF, 1.6MB) states that police officers should investigate the welfare of all children who have witnessed domestic abuse or who are normally resident at an address at which a domestic abuse-related incident has been reported. Where there is any concern as to the welfare or safety of a child, officers should make a notification to the police child abuse investigation unit (CAIU). Any referrals made to local authority children's social care departments should, where possible, be made by officers from the CAIU.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. It includes abuse carried out by a partner, ex-partner or family member. The government's definition of domestic violence and abuse recognises this and defines domestic abuse as:

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional"

Domestic abuse-related crimes

Incidents of domestic abuse that resulted in a crime being recorded by the police and are included in police recorded crime. These can also be referred to as domestic abuse-related offences. Domestic abuse-related crimes can be added to domestic abuse incidents to create a total picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.

Domestic homicides

Any homicide where the relationship between the victim (aged 16 years or over) and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories:

- spouse
- cohabiting partner
- boyfriend or girlfriend
- ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend
- adulterous relationship
- lover’s spouse
- son or daughter or parent (including step and adopted relationships)
- brother or sister
- other relatives

Domestic violence disclosure scheme or Clare’s Law (DVDS)

These schemes give members of the public a formal mechanism to make enquiries about an individual who they are in a relationship with, or who is in a relationship with someone they know, where there is a concern that the individual may be violent towards their partner. The scheme has two routes:

- “right to ask”: this enables someone to ask the police about a partner’s previous history of domestic violence or violent acts; a precedent for such a scheme exists with the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme
- “right to know”: the police can proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances

Domestic violence protection notice (DVPN)

The initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence. This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively prevent the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim’s home or otherwise contacting the victim.

Domestic violence protection order (DVPO)

This response can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days.

Domestic violence remedy order

The family courts can grant two types of remedy orders to prevent domestic violence:

- a non-molestation order, which can either prohibit particular behaviour or general molestation by someone who has previously been violent towards the applicant and/or any relevant children

- an occupation order, which can define or regulate rights of occupation of the home by the parties involved

Helpline

A helpline is a telephone service that offers information, advice or support to callers about particular issues. A domestic abuse helpline offers these services to victims of domestic abuse and their families, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Local, community-based helplines are distinct from the 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline. Many survivors may speak to both services, as the national helpline provides referrals to services in their local area, alongside refuge referrals, emotional support, risk assessment and safety planning, and information on rights and options.

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs)

An IDVA is a professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse worker, who supports high-risk victims of domestic abuse. High-risk cases are determined using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist, professional judgement and where repeat incidents are occurring.

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)

A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, independent domestic violence advisors, probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

11 . Data sources and quality

This publication presents data on domestic abuse during the pandemic from a range of government and non-governmental sources. Not all data are classified as official statistics.

Further quality and methodology information can be found in the Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview.

Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW)

Face-to-face interviews for the Crime Survey in England and Wales (CSEW) were suspended on 17 March 2020 as part of efforts to minimise social contact and stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As a consequence, we designed a new survey to be conducted via telephone to continue measuring crime during the coronavirus pandemic period and while face-to-face interviews are not possible. The TCSEW was launched on 20 May 2020 and will run on a continuous basis until at least January 2021.

The TCSEW operation closely replicates that of the face-to-face CSEW, however because of restrictions on interview length[1] and sensitivities around the topic, the TCSEW contains a reduced number of questions. These include questions about respondents' experiences of a broad range of offences over the previous 12 months, as well as a short module specific to the pandemic period relating to their perceptions of crime, the police and anti-social behaviour.

Following ethical guidelines, questions from the more sensitive self-completion modules of the face-to-face CSEW are not included in the telephone-operated survey. As a result, estimates are not available in relation to sexual assault, partner abuse, abuse during childhood, and the preferred measure of domestic abuse and domestic violence. Data collected on domestic violence in the TCSEW will likely be affected by similar limitations to the face-to-face domestic violence measure and any findings will need to be interpreted with caution.

The sample frame for the TCSEW has been formed from re-contacting CSEW respondents interviewed in the previous two years[2] who had agreed to be re-contacted for research purposes and had supplied a valid telephone number. Because of this time interval, all respondents are aged 18 years and over rather than aged 16 years and over.

As the number of respondents agreeing to be re-contacted is limited, we are estimating a final representative sample of around 3,000 interviews per month. Because of the nature of the sampling frame, we have designed the TCSEW as a panel survey and plan to re-interview respondents who agree to take part at three-month intervals.

Police recorded crime

Police recorded crime data are supplied to us by the Home Office, who are responsible for the collation of recorded crime data supplied by the 43 territorial police forces of England and Wales[3], plus the British Transport Police. These data are supplied to the Home Office on a monthly basis for each crime within the notifiable offence list.

For the purposes of this publication, data on police recorded crime have been provided in a monthly format to enable comparisons to be made over the pandemic period. The recorded crime figures are collated via a live administrative system that are continually being updated as forces submit data. The data represent a “snapshot” of the live database.

The data for the months of April to June 2020 have not undergone the same revisions and reconciliation processes that would normally have been undertaken by police forces and the Home Office prior to publishing our annual release. Figures may differ slightly from those published in subsequent releases for the same period, although this does not mean that the figures previously published were inaccurate at the time that they were reported.

In addition, although reductions in crime are likely to have been influenced by the lockdown, some differences may be the result of normal monthly variation within the crime types. Changes in police recording and police activity in response to the lockdown are also likely to have contributed, along with changes in the reporting of crime to the police.

Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics. Details of concerns over the quality of these data are in the UK Statistics Authority most recent assessment report.

More information on police recorded crime can be found in the User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services – in the public interest. They provide data on arrests and voluntary attendances for domestic abuse-related crimes, domestic violence protection notices and orders (DVPNs and DVPOs), the domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS) and child protection referrals from domestic abuse incidents.

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

The MoJ publishes data on the number of domestic violence remedy applications and orders made. They have provided weekly figures from the week commencing 2 March 2020 to the week commencing 22 June 2020 alongside baseline figures for comparison purposes, calculated from a weekly average from the week commencing 2 September 2019 to the week commencing 24 February 2020 inclusive.

London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

London's Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is the territorial police force responsible for law enforcement in Greater London, which covers a population of around 9 million people. MPS data include the number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents they received between 1 January and 10 June in 2020, with comparisons to the volume of calls in 2019. Full analysis of these data, alongside MPS crime records is available in a paper written by London School of Economics: Changing patterns of domestic abuse during COVID-19 lockdown.

Women's Aid Federation of England

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. It is a federation of over 180 organisations who provide just under 300 local life-saving services to women and children across the country.

Women's Aid Federation of England holds key datasets on women experiencing domestic abuse at every stage of their journey from recognition to freedom and the services which support them and conduct custom research.

On Track collects data on the experiences and support needs of women supported by local domestic abuse services and Women's Aid's own direct services including LiveChat and the No Woman Turned Away Project.

Routes to Support (formerly UK Refuges Online) is the UK wide database of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid. It contains detailed, up-to-date information on the nature and scope of VAWG services throughout the UK, including services for specific groups of women and women with additional support needs.

Women's Aid England utilised their existing sources (Routes to Support and On Track) and drew data from five specifically designed surveys to look at how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected victims of domestic abuse in England. Their findings, and a detailed methodology of their surveys is summarised in their A Perfect Storm report, in which data covers the period from the start of lockdown measures in March 2020 to the closure of their June and July 2020 surveys. While the sample size for these surveys was relatively small, the data provide an insight into the impact of the pandemic as reported by the victims themselves.

Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the national umbrella body for third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales. Currently Welsh Women's Aid has 19 member organisations within Wales.

Welsh Women's Aid also runs the Live Fear Free Helpline, funded by the Welsh Government. The Live Fear Free Helpline is primarily for those suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence, but calls can be made by anyone (women, men and children) regarding any form of violence against women, and the caller will be referred to a service in their area.

The Live Fear Free Helpline is a free service, staffed 24/7 every day of the year. Data from these helplines give insight into those who use these services, as well as how victims are signposted once they call the helplines. They have provided data on the demand for their Live Fear Free helpline in April to June 2020, compared with the same period in the previous year.

Welsh Women's Aid provided data on the demand of refuge, community and sexual violence support services in Wales for April to June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. They also provided data from two separate surveys run in April and June 2020, to gather information from organisations offering support services in Wales. The April survey gathered online responses between 1 April 2020 and 15 April 2020 and asked organisations about demand in the first three weeks of lockdown (since 23 March 2020). The June survey gathered online responses between 17 June 2020 and 7 July 2020 and asked about demand since 16 April 2020.

Refuge

Refuge is a nationwide charity that provides specialist support for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse. Refuge offers a range of services such as community outreach, emergency refuge accommodation, support workers and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs).

The 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, provides emotional and practical support to women experiencing domestic abuse, as well as to concerned family, friends and professionals. This includes referrals to refuge places and community-based domestic abuse services, empowering women with information about their rights and options, and support around safety-planning. Refuge introduced a live chat service in May 2020, so women trapped at home with their perpetrators during lockdown had one more way to communicate with them.

ManKind Initiative

The ManKind Initiative is a domestic abuse charity based in the UK. The ManKind Initiative is at the forefront of providing support for male victims of domestic abuse.

Since becoming a charity in 2001, it has provided training and support for statutory agencies (primarily the police and local authorities). It also runs campaigns to ensure that equal recognition is given to male and female victims of domestic abuse. Further to this, the ManKind Initiative operates a confidential helpline available for all men across the UK suffering from domestic abuse.

ManKind has provided data on the monthly number of calls to their helpline from January 2019 to September 2020, and the number of hits on their website from April to September 2019 and 2020.

Victim Support

Victim Support is an independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales. For victims of domestic abuse, it offers outreach services to provide practical and emotional support. Victim Support is also one of the largest single independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) providers in England and Wales.

Victim Support collates data on referrals to IDVA services. It also runs both specialist domestic abuse services and wider multi-crime services (commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners). The multi-crime services pick up lower-risk domestic abuse cases and cases where victims do not wish to engage with specialist organisations. Victim Support also collates data on multi-crime service cases flagged as domestic abuse-related.

Victim Support has provided data on the weekly number of domestic abuse cases recorded in its case management system from the 23 March 2020 to 20 September 2020. This is compared with the average weekly number of cases between 6 January and 1 March 2020.

SafeLives

SafeLives is a UK-wide domestic abuse charity that has a strategy to stop domestic abuse before it starts. SafeLives obtains information from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe and well and to rebuild their lives. SafeLives is responsible for collecting data from every multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from some MARACs in Scotland.

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is a meeting between representatives from a range of services in which information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases. Attendees include local police, healthcare practitioners, child protection practitioners, housing practitioners, IDVAs, probation workers and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. After sharing all relevant information about the circumstances for a particular victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the victim's safety and turn these into a coordinated action plan.

The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim, but it is also a forum for highlighting risk posed to linked individuals by the same perpetrator or perpetrators. Both those linked individuals, and the perpetrators, should be the subject of similar coordinated planning either at the MARAC or at linked forums that safeguard children and manage the behaviour of the perpetrators.

All MARACs fall within police force area boundaries, but police force areas can have more than one MARAC, depending on the size of the area and structure of the local authorities. This means that MARACs vary in size.

At the centre of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of a victim's life, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The victim does not attend the meeting but is represented by an IDVA who advocates on their behalf and holds statutory agencies to account.

The collection of MARAC data began in 2004 and, since 2010, a national overview of MARACs covering England and Wales has been available. SafeLives has provided data on the number of cases and repeat referrals for the year ending June 2019 and 2020. To assess the impact of the pandemic on MARACs, SafeLives also provided data from a survey sent out to each MARAC in England and Wales from the 21 April 2020 until 10 June 2020.

12 . Related links

Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020
Statistical bulletin | Released 25 November 2020
Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020
Article | Released 25 November 2020
Prevalence, long-term trends and types of domestic abuse experienced by adults, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and police recorded crime.

Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020
Article | Released 25 November 2020
Characteristics of victims of domestic abuse based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018
Article | Released 25 November 2019
Information from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the amount, type and nature of partner abuse experienced in the last year.

Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020
Article | Released 25 November 2020
Information on services that are available to victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales.

Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020
Article | Released 25 November 2020
Information on responses to and outcomes of domestic abuse cases in the criminal justice system.

How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system
Article | Released 25 November 2020
Information on the stages of the criminal justice process in England and Wales, and how data are captured at each stage.