



# Domestic abuse frontline service COVID-19 survey results for June 2020

## About SafeLives

We are SafeLives, the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good.

We work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. We want what you would want for your best friend. We listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of our thinking. We look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. And we challenge perpetrators to change, asking 'why doesn't he stop?' rather than 'why doesn't she leave?' This applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship.

Last year alone, nearly 11,000 professionals working on the frontline received our training. Over 65,000 adults at risk of serious harm or murder and more than 85,000 children received support through dedicated multi-agency support designed by us and delivered with partners. In the last three years, over 1,000 perpetrators have been challenged and supported to change by interventions we created with partners, and that's just the start.

Together we can end domestic abuse. Forever. For everyone.

## About the survey

Following our original survey<sup>1</sup>, SafeLives wanted to assess the extent to which COVID-19 was continuing to impact frontline domestic abuse services. We sent out an online survey with frontline services by email and shared it on our social media feeds. The survey was open from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April to Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June and we received 73 responses. There were a few duplicated responses, where more than one person from the same service had responded, so we removed 10 responses. The data is drawn from the 63 remaining responses.

The 63 services covered a range of police force areas, with the most common being Metropolitan Police (11%), North Wales (10%) and South Wales (10%).

The types of services provided were varied, with the majority providing outreach (67%) and Idva/Idaa (60%) support. Just under half (44%) of services had refuge provision. Seven services (11%) also provided support to perpetrators

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<sup>1</sup>[https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SafeLives%20survey%20of%20frontline%20domestic%20abuse%20organisations%20for%20COVID-19%2030.03.20\\_0.pdf](https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SafeLives%20survey%20of%20frontline%20domestic%20abuse%20organisations%20for%20COVID-19%2030.03.20_0.pdf)

## Headlines

Services have highlighted both the increased risk to clients and the significant challenges they face in responding effectively to people under the current circumstances:

- Almost a quarter (24%) were concerned about the possible increase to referrals once lockdown starts to ease.
- Over one third (38%) had seen an increase to caseloads. This is an increase from 22% the last time the survey was published. The majority of those (83%) said this was due to an increase in numbers of clients being referred, an increase from 73%, and 29% said that it was because of staff absence meaning that other workers have to take on additional cases, a decrease from 46%.
- Where services had noticed a decrease in referrals, they were concerned that this could be due to survivors not being able to ask for support during this time, and that it would lead to an increase in referrals post-lockdown.
- Out of the respondents who discussed remote working, 86% cited IT and tech challenges in delivering services remotely under the current circumstances. This is an increase from 67% the last time the survey was published.
- Nine (14%) services have seen an increase in child to parent violence and abuse and of these one (11%) said they did not have an effective intervention working with young people and their parents to prevent it.
- Over one in ten (13%) said they have unsafe staffing levels at present. This is an increase from 9% the last time the survey was published. Over a third of those (38%) said that this would affect their ability to deliver a safe service.
- Of those that currently do have safe staffing levels, almost half (47%) were unsure if this would change in the next few weeks. This is a reduction from 60% the last time.
- Over half (52%) said they had to reduce service delivery during Covid-19 restrictions. This is a reduction from 76% the last time the survey was published.
- Just under one third (29%) of services do not feel able to safely support child victims of domestic abuse. This is a reduction from 42% the last time.
- Over one third (35%) of services had experienced issues with staff accessing key worker status. This is an increase from 17% the first time this survey was published. Out of those who responded, over one third (36%) discussed issues getting their children into school, such as limited places for children.
- Over one in ten (13%) services said they were experiencing financial difficulties. Of these, 50% said this was due to funding opportunities having dried up and 13% due to local commissioners changing commissioning due to COVID-19. These findings are similar to those presented in the last iteration of this survey.
- Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, three services have lost funding and nine services have gained funding. Two fifths (41%) of services said that their funding had remained consistent.
- Out of the 34 respondents who raised further issues, 35% said they were concerned about the increased risk their clients faced. This is compared to 79% the last time this survey was published.

## Recommendations

The isolation of families, while necessary to contain the spread of the virus, has exacerbated the issue of domestic abuse - leaving thousands of adult and child victims of abuse at risk from perpetrators.

During lockdown national helplines saw large increases in callers, and our survey suggests that services are starting to see an increase in demand with over one third (38%) citing an increase to caseloads. This is an increase from 22% the last time the survey was published. The majority of those (83%) said this was due to an increase in numbers of clients being referred.

We encourage the Government to consider the following actions:

- Given that nearly a quarter of services expect demand to increase as lockdown restrictions relax, there is a need for a long-term sustainable fund (over 3 years) for services to ensure they have the resources to increase staffing levels, particularly when they reach the cliff-edge of October 31<sup>st</sup> when the emergency funding packages finish. Services have told us that they have struggled to use current emergency funding to hire new personnel because of the short-term nature of the package – in some cases giving them no more than 4 months to spend funds. Clearly services have moved heaven and earth to ensure they can continue their life-saving services during COVID-19. Now, they and their clients need a sense of security that they can continue to deliver these services as demand increases into the future. The upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review alongside the Victim's Funding Strategy should ensure that domestic abuse services receive funding for the whole family – adult and child victims, as well as perpetrators of abuse.
- Many services are still struggling with IT and technology issues for their own staff and for survivors. A dedicated tech innovation fund which includes resources for hardware, software, training of staff and IT tech support, online development e.g. webchats/making online resources more accessible, should be established to support services across the next year.
- There has been an increase in adolescent to parent violence confirmed by services responding in this survey and in evidence from helplines reporting data during the COVID crisis. We suggest that the Home Office guidance on APVA<sup>2</sup> should be updated in consultation with specialist domestic abuse sector and children's sector organisations, in partnership with the Departments for Education and Health and Social Care. The guidance should be accompanied by funding for specialist organisations to upskill frontline practitioners to better understand the particular issues surrounding APVA along with guidance and dedicated funding streams for commissioners as part of the new Victim's Funding Strategy to ensure there is service provision in every area for victims of APVA and support for young people who are using harmful behaviour.
- As part of the long-term sustainable fund for victims of domestic abuse suggested above, the Government should create specific funding streams for those under 18 to be able to access YPVA and other specialist children's support services in all local areas. Approximately a third of services in our survey say they are still struggling to support child victims of domestic abuse. Research has shown that provision of specialist children's services is patchy<sup>3</sup> including no support for child victims at all in four local authority areas. Young people experiencing domestic abuse in their own intimate partner relationships also experience poor provision – the Children's Society found<sup>4</sup> that 19 local authorities do not provide a specialist YPVA service or equivalent for 16 and 17 year old victims living in their areas or any additional domestic abuse services to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/keeping-children-in-safe-and-loving-homes/domestic-abuse-policy-report/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/missing-the-mark-teenage-relationship-abuse-report-by-the-childrens-society-1.pdf>

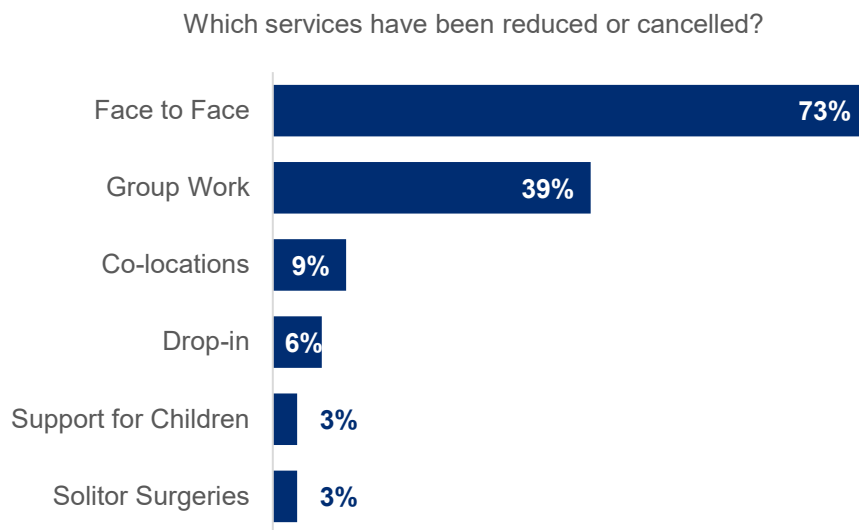
this age group, while 26 did not provide a specialist YPVA service or equivalent to under 16 victims living in their areas or any additional domestic abuse services.

### Reduction in services

Over half (52%) of respondents said that they had to reduce service delivery due to Covid-19. This is a reduction from the last time this survey was published, where 76% of services had to reduce services.

These respondents were asked to provide a list of services that had been reduced or cancelled. There were 33 responses to this question, who provided a total of 45 comments. These comments were coded under six categories, which can be seen in the chart below. Percentages are out of the total number of respondents.

Face to Face and group work remain the most common services to be reduced.



### Reduced face to face support and group work

The majority of services have had to reduce face to face work (79%) and almost two fifths have had to reduce group work (39%). Just over a fifth (22%) specified said that services had been replaced by either phone calls, or an online service such as Zoom.

***“Physical face to face client support -including group recovery support and Peer Support (all via phone and digital means)”***

***“We have had to adapt all our group delivery to 1:1 using online resources. All our joint appointments have ceased & this puts hard to reach & vulnerable clients at risk”***

### Reduced co-location

Three services (9%) had had to change their co-location practices. This included changing joint visits and not working in health settings.

***“We normally work within the A&E department and move into the wards as needed. We have withdrew [sic] from the hospitals...”***

## Police response

This question was added to the second iteration of the survey. Over two thirds (35%) of respondents had noticed a change in the local police response to domestic abuse cases or the support they provide to their service or service users.

### Positive changes

Over a third of the further comments (37%) were positive, such as improved partnership working with the police, police responding quicker to incidents, being more sensitive when they interact with victims and being more proactive.

***“The police asked to be notified of the current clients we are supporting who are still living with their perpetrators. They are then “flagging” them on their system to respond to quicker.”***

***“They are more sensitive when they approach incidents of domestic abuse and seem to demonstrate a more subtle approach when completing welfare checks on victims to ensure they do not increase the risk for them.”***

### Negative changes

Almost a quarter of responses were negative, such as a reduction in police referrals and police getting less involved with breaches of child contact orders.

***“Less likely to get involved in issues over child contact even when breaching orders. Slow to process referrals”***

***“Lack of support from the Domestic Abuse Unit”***

***“Undertakings with police bail have increased as an alternative to keeping perpetrators in custody until the next lawful day. Police bail conditions are not always appropriate/robust although this is meant to be a risk led decision...”***

One comment described the police response as patchy.

***“It has been patchy. We have had some really good police responses, but investigations are slow and there have been police responses amounting to ‘why have you called us out?’ when called to a serious incident.”***

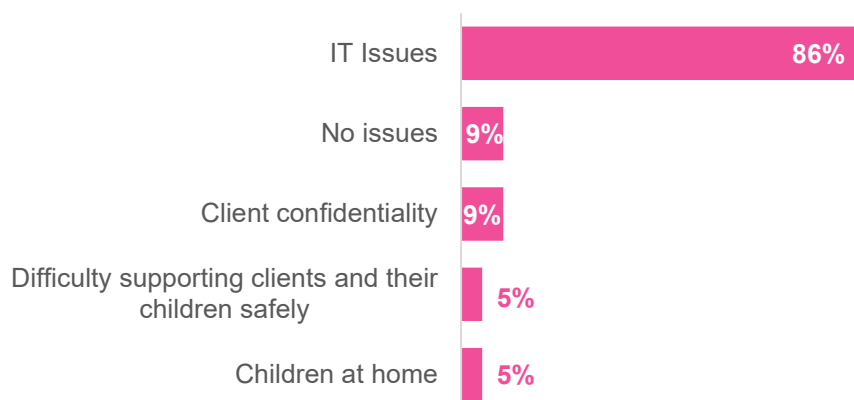
## Remote working

Almost half (48%) of services said that all their staff were either home or remote working. This is a reduction from 61% the last time the survey was published.

Respondents were then asked if they had any issues with remote working. There were 22 responses to this question, with 25 comments being provided. These comments were coded under five categories, which can be seen in the chart below. Percentages are out of the total number of respondents.

IT issues continues to be the biggest issue staff are facing, however only 9% of staff cited client confidentiality as an issue compared to 42% the last time the survey was published.

For remote working staff please list any issues they are experiencing working remotely



### IT issues

The majority (86%) of services reported having issues with either IT resources or internet connection:

***“We are in desperate need of laptops and decent phones... Our software is old, and our remote email is poor”***

***“Delivery of 1:1 programmes can sometimes be challenging with connection issues or because service users don’t have technology”***

***“...we do not have the capacity to work from home other than reading emails and making calls”***

### Client confidentiality

Two services (9%) services reported issues around client confidentiality or privacy, particularly relating to childcare.

***“...any considerations that have had to be made our around ensuring that calls are confidential from the workers environment. Staff have been able to work out personal rotas and systems with partners to ensure that childcare and privacy is resolved.”***

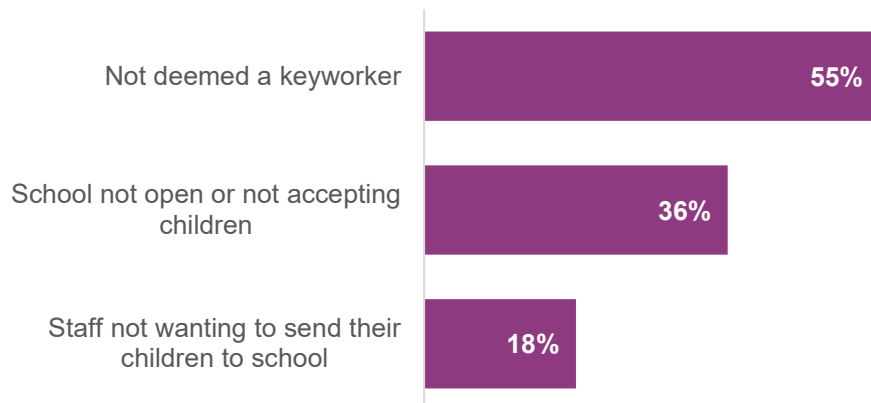
### Key worker status

Over one third (35%) respondents told us that their frontline staff with children had issues with accessing key worker status to enable their children to continue receiving childcare. This is an increase from 17% the last time the survey was published.

When asked to give further details, eleven (50%) did so, and their responses were coded into three categories which can be seen in the chart below, leading to twelve comments in total. Percentages are out of the number of respondents.

Not deemed a keyworker and school not open or accepting children continued to be the most common issue. However, 18% of services had staff who did not want to send their children to school, which did not feature in the previous iteration of the survey.

Have your frontline staff with children had issues with accessing childcare?



### Not deemed a keyworker

Over half (55%) of respondents had staff who had difficulties being recognised as a keyworker

***“We have had nothing to say that we are Keyworkers at the present time and do not feel through the Media etc that we are being recognised as still continuing working and running Supported Housing for women fleeing.”***

***“Some childcare are [sic] insisting on both parents being keyworkers to be entitled to any childcare.”***

### School not open or not accepting children

Over one third (36%) of respondents discussed issues getting their children into school, such as limited places for children.

***“Two members of staff contacted schools who were over-subscribed and were then not accepted for a place (for their children)”***

***“One staff is a keyworker - her son’s school said if she is a keyworker and can work from home, then the child must be with her...”***

### Staff not wanting to send their children to school

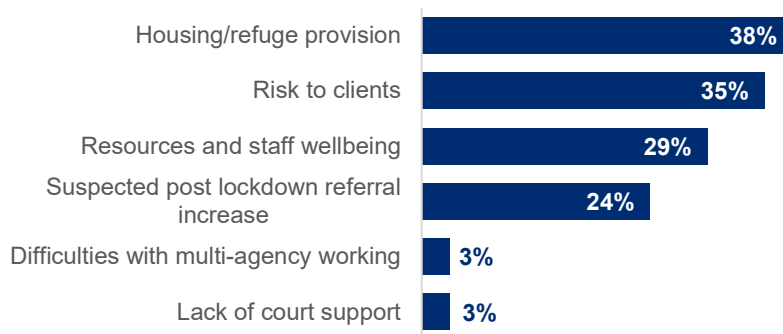
Almost one fifth (18%) of respondents discussed how staff did not want to send their children to school, with all comments citing staff being concerned about the spread of Covid-19.

### Any other issues or concerns

Services were asked if they had any other issues or concerns, they or their service users are experiencing due to COVID-19. There were 34 responses to this question, who provided a total of 45 comments. These comments were coded under seven categories, which can be seen in the chart below. Percentages are out of the total number of respondents.

In the first iteration of this survey, the most most common additional concerns were risk to clients (79%), resources ad staff well being (34%) and housing and refuge prvision (31%). Notably, a quarter of services in this version of the findings comments on concerns around a potential increase in referrals as lockdown restrictions begin to ease.

Please let us know about any other issues or concerns you may have



### Housing and refuge provision

Over one third (38%) of respondents were concerned about housing/refuge provision. Comments included concerns about waiting times for clients awaiting transfers and the lack of availability of refuge beds.

***“Lack of temporary accommodation due to refuges being full and no move on from this, and temp accommodation is [in] short supply...”***

### Risk to clients

Over one third (35%) of respondents wanted to tell us about the risk to clients. This ranged from risk of domestic abuse, to concerns around service user’s mental health in lockdown.

***“In lock down it is difficult make contact with clients - I am concerned victims aren’t able to call during this period...”***

### Resources and staff wellbeing

Almost one third (29%) of service users were concerned around resources, such as finances and staff, and staff wellbeing, such as staff having to deal with increases in service users feeling suicidal, and concerns around vicarious trauma.

***“We are considering how best to support staff working at home in relation to Vicarious Trauma...”***

***“The government have given unclear funding advice, small charities that are not funded by the local authority or PCC are losing out on government funding...”***

### Concerns around post lockdown increase in referrals

Almost a quarter (24%) of services were concerned that there would be an increase in referrals once lockdown restrictions start to ease. One service had already noted an increase in referrals because of this.

***“We believe that we will see a massive increase after lockdown as people are struggling to access us at the moment - we have seen a 50% increase in traffic to our website so we know people want support...”***