



SafeLives' survey of survivors of domestic abuse 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 this survey

This is the 6th iteration of our survey of survivors currently experiencing domestic abuse which was launched on the 20th March 2020. A total of 148 respondents have completed the survey.

Updates to the survey

On the 17th April 2020 we added four extra questions to the survivor survey. These questions look at victims' and survivors' access to support. It asks where survivors have gone to ask for support, where they would like to access support and what they would hope to find online if they were looking for advice, guidance and support on the internet. The responses to these questions are included in this survey update for the first time.

Headlines

- Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) had not asked for help since Covid-19 restrictions. The most common reasons for this were respondents finding it difficult to reach out for support as a result of lockdown restrictions (such as virtual-only support or living with someone who is shielding) or feeling let down previously by professionals.
- The most common response to concerns around safety, with a third of the total responses (39%), was a fear of the perpetrator.
- Almost one in ten (9%) of respondents who were concerned about their own safety said they couldn't escape or were in isolation.

- Almost one in ten (8%) of respondents who were concerned about their own safety felt that the courts or police were not responding quickly enough. Both criminal and civil courts and protective orders have been cited as a concern.
- When responding to a question about what would increase their safety, 31% felt that the way to increase their safety was to be away from the perpetrator. This included those who lived with the perpetrator and wanted to leave or wanted the perpetrator to leave, as well as those who were living away from the perpetrator but feared that the perpetrator knew where they lived, that they would see the perpetrator in the area or that the perpetrator could contact them at any time
- When asked what else was worrying, 76% had concerns around their mental health, 56% had concerns around finances and 52% feared for the safety of their children.

Recommendations

- The Government should ensure there is a long-term sustainable plan (over 3 years) for funding domestic abuse services (both accommodation and community-based) – for adult and child victims, and perpetrator interventions at all risk levels.
- Instead of asking “why doesn’t she leave” we should ask “why doesn’t he stop?” The response to domestic abuse victims should place the responsibility to leave on perpetrators, rather than victims (where it’s safe to do), to ensure that victims and survivors have the option of staying in the home if they wish. This should include options for rehousing perpetrators so that adult and child victims can remain in their own home. At a national level the Government should instigate a Perpetrator Strategy¹ alongside long-term sustainable funding for perpetrator services at all risk levels.
- Victims and survivors remain concerned at a lack of support for their children – ensuring children and young people across all age ranges have access to specialist support must be a priority for the Department for Education. This should include provision for those parents experiencing abuse from their own children which our survey of frontline services has shown has escalated during COVID-19, alongside provision of YPVAs (Young People’s Violence Advisors) for those young people experiencing abuse in their own intimate partner relationships².
- Roll-out of the Home Office code word scheme should form part of a long-term awareness campaign, led by a public health approach.
- Campaigns such as SafeLives’ #ReachIn³ campaign should be promoted nationally to ensure family, friends and community responders are equipped to reach out to victims and survivors if they spot the signs.
- Cultural change training, akin to Domestic Abuse Matters⁴, should be made a priority for all frontline professionals so that they know how to respond to a disclosure and refer into specialist services.
- Ensuring there are common standards across the sector such as Leading Lights accreditation⁵ for services and professional qualifications for staff, should be a key priority for the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office to ensure that commissioners are commissioning services on a level playing field and helping to drive up best practice.
- Commissioned support for victims and survivors should be end-to-end including support through the criminal justice process, particularly since so many cases have been delayed. CPS Best Practice guidance suggests that all victims of domestic abuse going to court should receive support from an Idva.
- Survivors need swift access to therapeutic support in the NHS to enable them to start their recovery journey.
- Psychological violence should be prioritised as equally as physical violence as it causes severe, long-term harm to victims.

¹ <http://driveproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Call-to-Action-Final.pdf>

² <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>

³ <https://safelives.org.uk/reach-in>

⁴ <https://safelives.org.uk/training/police>

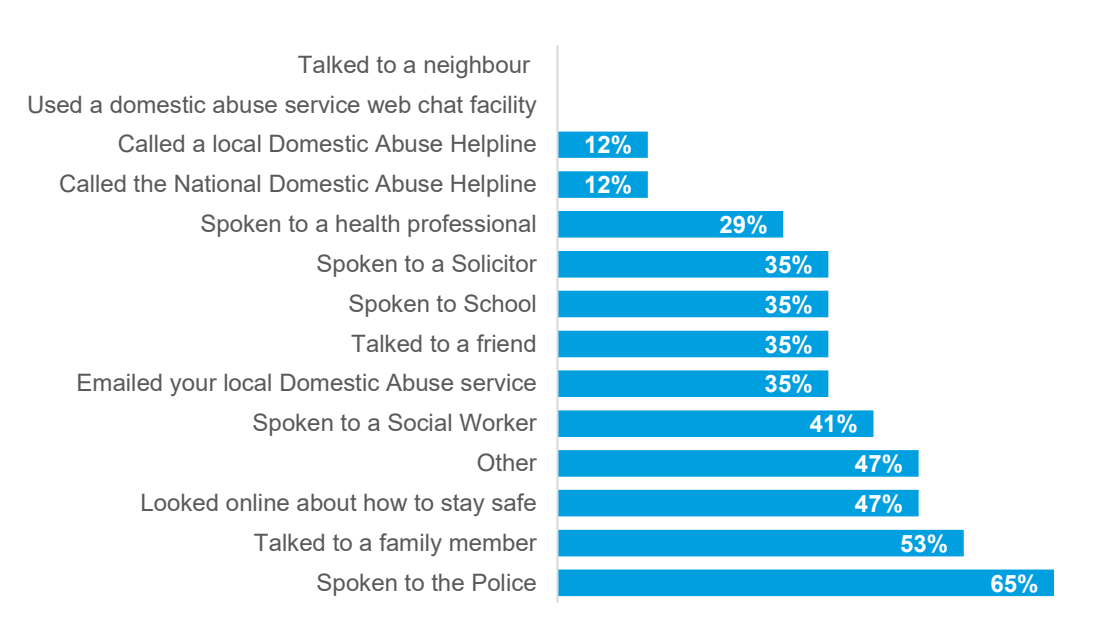
⁵ <https://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-domestic-abuse-and-idva-service-managers/leading-lights#:~:text=SafeLives%20Leading%20Lights%20is%20the,supporting%20victims%20of%20domestic%20abuse.>

- Post-separation coercive and controlling behaviour should be made a criminal offence⁶.

Help seeking during Covid-19 restrictions

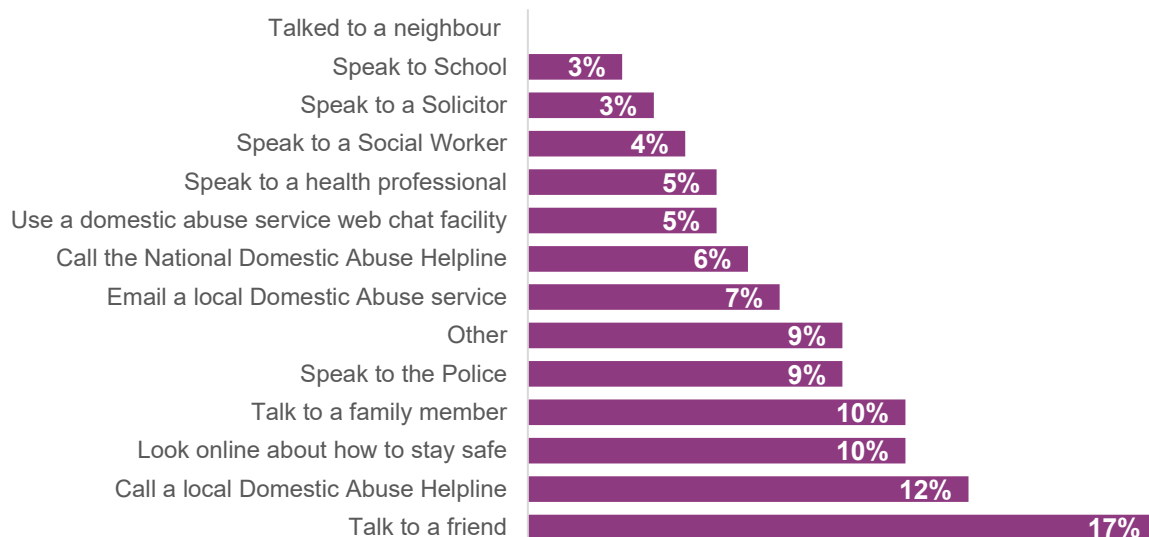
These four questions were added to the survey on the 17th April and have received 44 responses.

Over two thirds (39%) of respondents had asked for support during lockdown restrictions whereas 61% had not asked for support. Respondents were asked to select how they had asked for support and were allowed to select multiple answers. The most common answer was to speak to the police, talk to a family member and look online for how to stay safe, 47% selected other and gave further details, with answers ranging from twitter, to online therapy sessions, to speaking to their Idva.

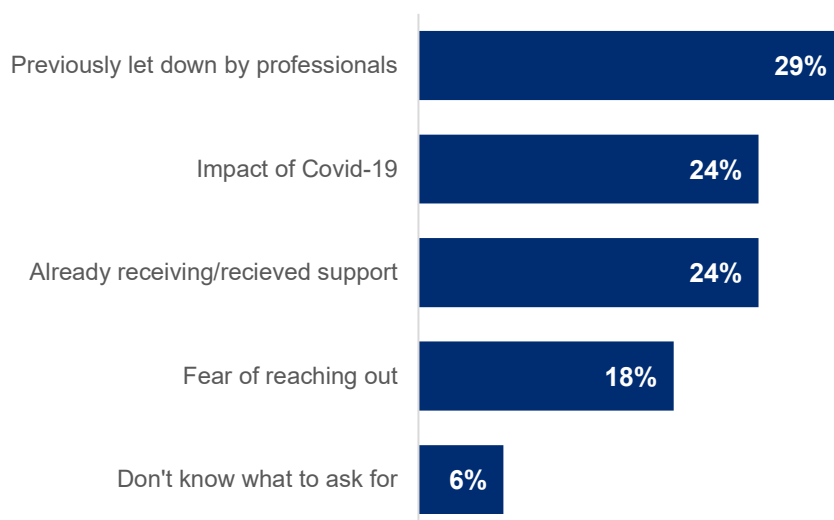


Respondents were then asked, if they were thinking of asking for support, where they might do this. They were given the same list of agencies and were able to select multiple options. The most common answers were talk to a friend, call a local domestic abuse helpline, talk to a family member and look for support online.

⁶ <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SEA-briefing-DA-Bill-April-2020-final.pdf>



Respondents were asked in their own words why they hadn't asked for support. The answers were coded into five themes and if their answers covered more than one theme they were separated out. This left a total of 17 comments.



Survivors feeling let down by professionals in the past

Five respondents felt that they had previously let down in the past and therefore did not feel as though they would be supported or believed in the future. Agencies included the police, specialist domestic abuse services and services for men.

“The police response I’ve had has been soul destroying repeatedly.” [April 2020]

“Because I was working with [local service] before this virus and got nowhere with them and didn’t feel they gave me any support what so ever” [May 2020]

Impact of Covid-19

Four respondents commented that lockdown was either impacting them being able to ask support because they can't leave the house as the perpetrator is shielding or that virtual or telephone support isn't accessible for them.

“My husband has been shielding since January” [May 2020]

Afraid of reaching out for support

Three respondents commented that they were afraid of asking for support.

“Scared and not allowed” [May 2020]

***“I am not believed. He is extremely manipulating and seems to turn everyone to believing him”
[April 2020]***

Already received/receiving support or don't know where to look for support.

Four respondents were already receiving support or had received support in the past and didn't feel they needed support at this time. One respondent said that they did not know where to look for help

“I am receiving counselling and my son is finally with a clinical psychologist” [April 2020]

“Had support before and can cope with it now” [May 2020]

Finally, in this section respondents were asked in their own words what they would hope to find when looking for support online. The comments were coded into themes and separated out if they covered more than one area, resulting in 33 comments.

Specialist support

The most common answer (76%) were respondents looking for specialist domestic abuse support, including someone to listen to, understand and believe as well as correct advice and information about how to remove perpetrator from the home and legal advice.

***“People who understand...not to be blamed by social services because they don't understand”
[June 2020]***

“Someone who understands and can help me bring this to an end” [April 2020]

“Correct and current information” [April 2020]

Family court support

Over one in ten (12%) mentioned family courts as a specific area that they wanted to find support on.

“That the family court has an ounce of common sense.” [May 2020]

Mental Health

Almost one in ten (9%) of respondents wanted support with their mental health.

“Coping strategies, respite, someone to listen and take it seriously” [May 2020]

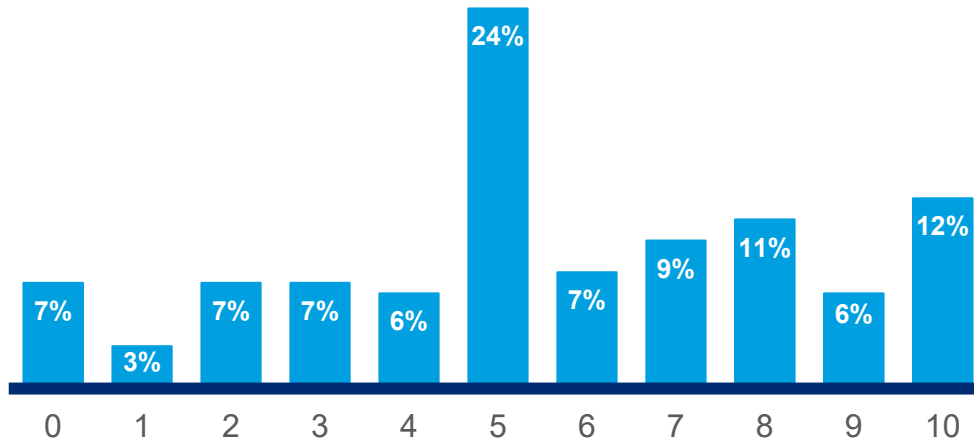
Removal of the perpetrator

One respondent wanted support with removing the perpetrator.

Safety of Respondents

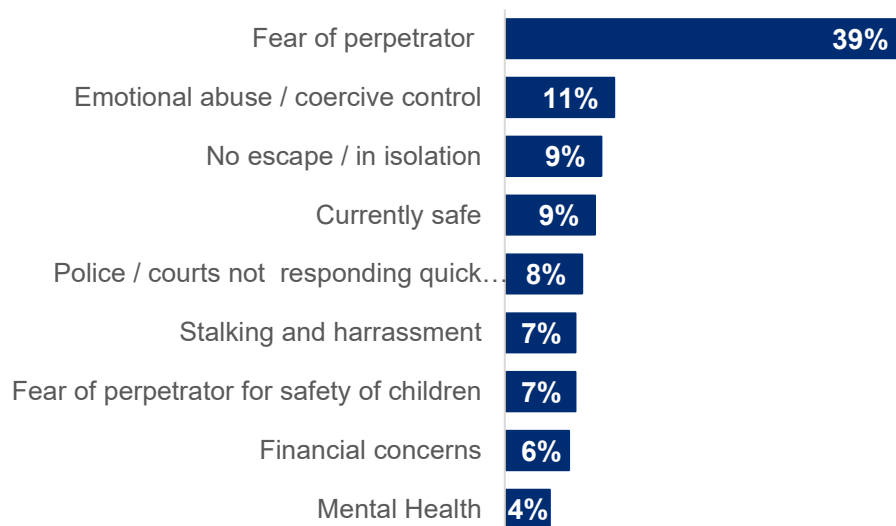
Respondents were asked to state, on a scale of 0 to 10, how safe they felt (0 = not at all safe, 10= safe). All but one respondent answered this question. Just under a quarter (24%) of respondents rated themselves at a 5 out of 10 in terms of safety. In this analysis, over a quarter (29%) respondents rated themselves below the mid-point scale of five.

How safe do you feel?	Number of respondents	%
0	10	7%
1	4	3%
2	10	7%
3	10	7%
4	9	6%
5	36	24%
6	11	7%
7	14	9%
8	16	11%
9	9	6%
10	18	12%



Concerns around safety

Respondents were asked to respond in their own words about their concerns around their safety at this time. A total of 125 respondents answered this question. If their answers covered more than one topic it was split into multiple comments leading to 159 comments in total. The totals given are a percent out of the total number of comments.



Fear of Perpetrator

The most common response to concerns around safety, with over a third of the total responses (39%), was a fear of the perpetrator. All forms of domestic abuse and violence were mentioned in this category. Fear of perpetrator includes concerns around safety when living with the perpetrator, those considering leaving, as well as those who were not living in the same home. For those not in the same household concerns for safety included the perpetrator turning up at the place they were staying or in the area where they lived. Responses also included a fear that the perpetrator would murder them.

“I’m currently 26 weeks pregnant, stuck in a bedsit with my ex partner. I have no money, or no where [sic] to go. I cannot call a helpline for support as my partner will be able to hear me, plus I have telephone anxiety”. [March 2020]

“My partners temper and stress has increased a lot since the lockdown and I’m the only thing he can take it out on at the moment, he can’t let his stress out in usual ways”. [April 2020]

“Every so often he gets on his high horse and pushes me or spits in my face and he shouts and scares us” [April 2020]

Emotional abuse and / or coercive control

Over one in ten (11%) felt that emotional abuse and / or coercive control was a concern for their safety.

“Psychologically [sic] feel unsafe, being coercively controlled by ex husband as he has my daughter. Using the Covid-19 situation to further control and making it difficult as I am in the vulnerable category too... I am powerless and have no one to help me”. [March 2020]

“His emotional and verbal abuse is escalating the longer we’re isolated and I’m concerned that mentally I won’t survive this...” [March 2020]

SafeLives’ previous research into non-physical domestic abuse has found that 91% of survivors experienced psychological abuse at some point in their relationship.⁷

No escape and in isolation

Just under one in ten (9%) respondents felt that the isolation of the current situation was causing them concerns for their safety.

⁷ <https://www.safelivesresearch.org.uk/Comms/Psychological%20Violence%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

“Home is unsafe. I’m disabled & dependent on perp to provide care (meds, food, personal care, etc)...Home is not adapted for my needs so causes more dependence on perp to safely use our home. Have asked Local Authority for help but there are no Refuge’s for people with complex care/support/medical needs. It feels like I am trapped with no way out”. [March 2020]

“The amount of stuff makes me feel trapped more than ever. No escape from it” [May 2020]

Safe from the perpetrator

Just under one in ten victims who answered the survey (9%) felt that they were now safe from the perpetrator.

Police and/or Courts not responding adequately or quickly

Victims and survivors were concerned about the police and courts in 8% of responses.

“Pending case of stalking postponed again so had to request an updated restraining order” [April 2020]

Stalking and harassment

Stalking and harassment continue to be a theme in recent responses to the survey, being mentioned in 7% of responses.

“My children’s father threatens me and follows my movements. He still thinks he’s in a relationship and still try’s [sic] to control me where ever possible.” [May 2020]

Fears for safety of children and financial concerns

Concerns around children were highlighted in 7% of responses and finances in 6% of responses from the survey respondents.

“Concerns for children during contact” [May 2020]

“Financial vulnerability. Online vulnerability. Physical vulnerability.” [May 2020]

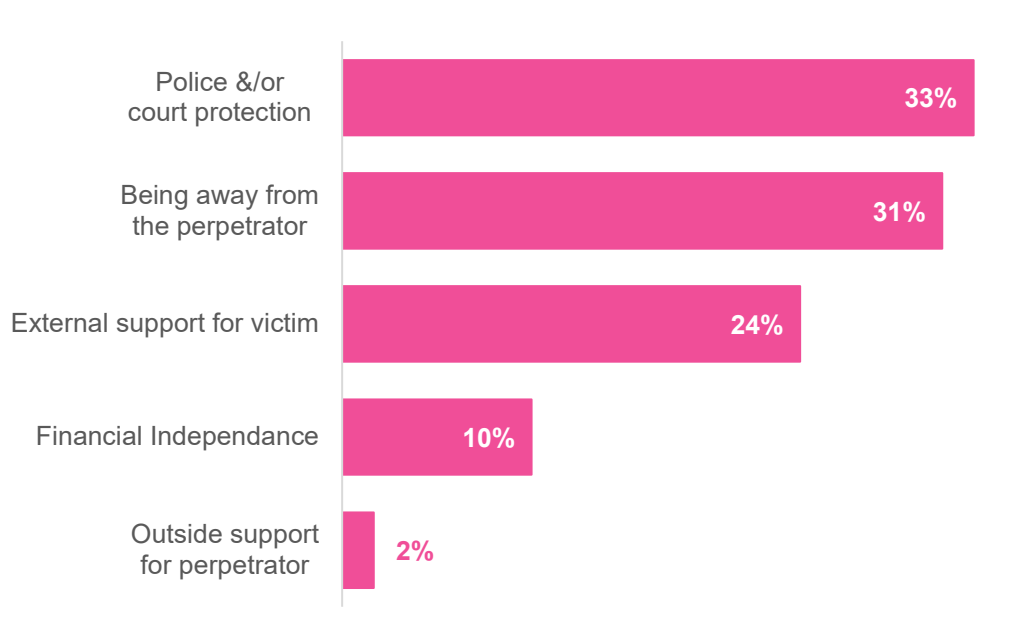
Mental Health

Mental health remains a concern in 4% of the responses.

“I have no safe place to stay and am at the pit of despair this is really affecting my mental health too” [May 2020]

Making people safer

Respondents were asked what they felt could make them feel safer at home during this time. If their answers covered more than one topic it was split into multiple comments. This led to 121 comments in total. The comments were split into five categories.



Police and/or court protection

The police and courts protection in order to make respondents feel safer was a particular concern for respondents. A third (33%) of respondents felt that both criminal and family courts could better protect victims, such as stopping perpetrators having contact with children, reports being taken more seriously or issuing court orders.

“If he wasn’t allowed to have any contact with me or my children” [May 2020]

“Family courts not intervening. They have made my life hell. Facilitating the abuse” [May 2020]

Being away from the Perpetrator

An increased number of responses (31%) felt that the way to increase their safety was to be away from the perpetrator. This included those who lived with the perpetrator and wanted to leave or wanted the perpetrator to leave, as well as those who were living away from the perpetrator but feared that the perpetrator knew where they lived, that they would see the perpetrator in the area or that the perpetrator could contact them at any time.

“For the known perpetrator to be removed from the home” [April 2020]

“Getting thousands of miles away from my ex” [April 2020]

Support for the Victim/Survivor

There were a similar number of responses seeking support for the victim or survivor with 24% of responses highlighting this would make them feel safer.

“Knowing I had somewhere to go. Having help and support” [April 2020]

“If there was someone more understanding of how abuse works who could see through what he is doing and make it stop...” [April 2020]

Financial Independence

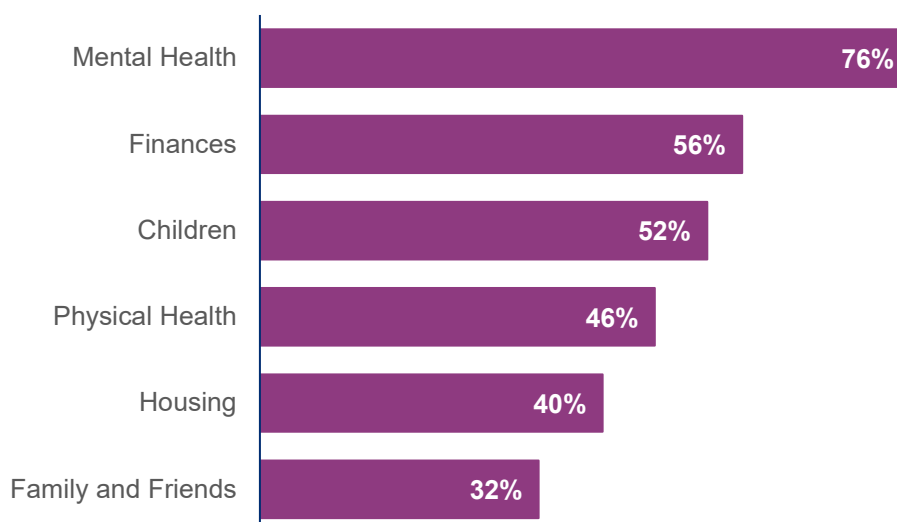
One in ten respondents (10%) felt financial independence or stability in relation to money, work and housing would increase their safety. However, there were no new comments that discussed this.

Perpetrator Support

Two respondents felt that they would be safer if the perpetrator received support.

What else?

Finally, respondents were asked what else they were worried about. They were given a specific list, as shown in the graph. Nearly all respondents (97%) answered this question. There was also an option to state 'Other' and name what this concern was. Nine respondents commented in this section with answers ranging from the availability of food, working from home during lockdown, the safety of others from the perpetrator and finding support if they have to move.



Relationship to Perpetrator

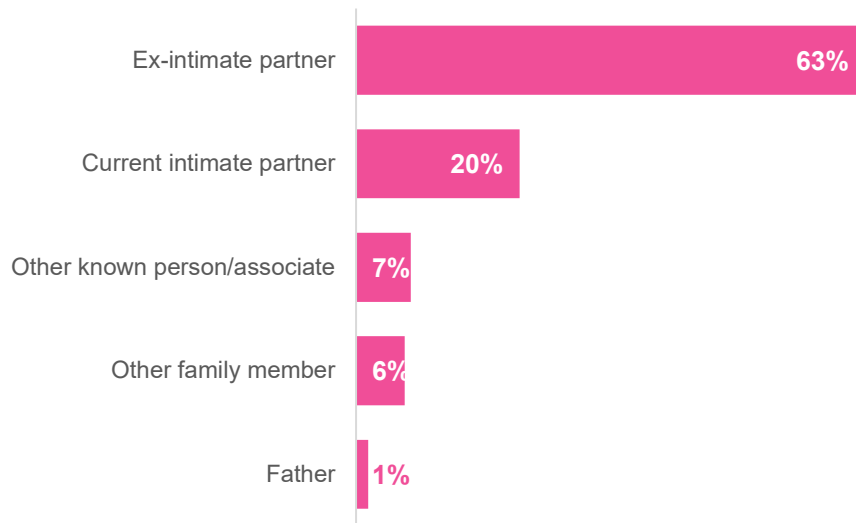
The first 14 respondents were not asked who the perpetrator of abuse was. The answers to this question, therefore, are the responses of the later 134 respondents. The most common relationship to a perpetrator was ex-intimate partner.

What is your relationship to the person abusing you?	%
Ex-intimate partner	63%
Current intimate partner	20%
Other known person/associate	7%
Other family member	6%
Father	1%

Other family members and known persons included:

- Daughter
- Brother
- Father of the children
- Landlord
- Workplace
- Grandchildren
- In-laws

- Friend
- Historic childhood abuse



Demographics

As well as safety concerns, SafeLives requested demographic information from those that participated in the survey. These are as follows:

Country

Capturing where the victim lives was introduced to the survey on the 1st April 2020. Responses are, therefore, only from the respondents who completed the survey since this date. The question is not compulsory, and 77 respondents answered this question.

Country	n	%
England	56	73%
Wales	13	17%
Scotland	5	6%
Northern Ireland	1	1%
Outside UK	2	3%
Gender	n	%
Female	132	89%
Male	15	10%
Describes themselves in another way	1	1%

Gender

The proportion of male respondents has stayed the same, with 11% being male. Since the last iteration of the survey, 7% of respondents were male.

Age

Over half of respondents were aged between 25 and 44 (56%) with the most common age group being 35-44. 10% of survivors were under 24.

Age	n	%
16-19	2	1%
20-24	14	9%
25-34	34	23%

35-44	49	33%
45-54	33	22%
55-64	15	10%
65+	1	1%

Children

Nearly four out of five (78%) of respondents had children.

Do you have children?	n	%
Yes	116	78%
No	29	20%

Of the 116 respondents that did have children, four out of five (79%) had children under the age of 18. The number of children for those who did have children under 18 is as follows.

If yes, how many?	n	%
1	23	35%
2	24	38%
3	12	18%
4	5	7%
5	2	2%

Just under three quarters (70%) have their children living in the home.

Other people in the household

Other members of the household are shown in the table below:

Who else lives in the home?	n	%
Current Partner	39	26%
Ex-intimate partner	10	7%
Mother	12	8%
Step-mother	1	1%
Father	5	3%
Other family member	20	14%
Other known person/associate	8	5%

Other family members and other known persons/associates included:

- Children over the age of 18
- Grandson
- Cousin
- Niece
- Brother
- Sister
- Step-child
- Landlord
- Flat mates / house mates / lodger

Outside the household

One fifth (20%) of respondents were caring for people outside of the household. The people they were caring for included:

Are you looking after anyone outside your home?	n	%
Current Partner	1	1%
Ex-intimate partner	1	1%
Mother	9	6%
Father	4	3%
Step-father	1	1%
Grandmother	9	6%
Grandfather	2	1%
Other family member	6	4%
Other known person/associate	4	3%

Other family members or known persons or associates included:

- Uncle
- Aunt
- Grandchildren