

Respect

Respect's
Response to the
Home Affairs Call
for Evidence
COVID-19
Preparedness

April 2020

Home Affairs Select Committee Evidence – Respect April 2020

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1. Respect – Who we are:

Respect is the UK domestic abuse charity providing the national voice on perpetrators, male victims and young people.

Respect was founded 20 years ago by a group of practitioners from organisations around the UK who wanted a national organisation to develop and promote work with perpetrators which was then in its infancy. We were registered as a charity in February 2000 and incorporated as a charitable company in March 2011. We have grown steadily over the years and broadened our scope, and now have a staff team of 30 who deliver a range of diverse activities.

As a membership organisation we advocate and provide a voice for organisations and individuals across the UK who work with perpetrators, young people and male victims. We currently have 62 organisational members and 20 individuals.

We:

- Bring about systems change, by improving statutory and voluntary sector responses to domestic abuse and influencing government policy and commissioning
- Collaborate with key partners to develop new and innovative practice
- Work closely with researchers to both develop a robust evidence base and inform research developments
- Provide specialist training and workforce development with a range of toolkits, resources and events to support best practice
- Set national standards focused on safety, effectiveness and accountability, and accredit organisations which meet these standards
- Run two government funded national helplines for perpetrators <http://respectphoneline.org.uk/> and male victims <http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/>

All of our work – even when focused on perpetrators – puts the needs of survivors first.

2. Respect: What we do:

Training and Sector development

We are the lead organisation for developing and delivering training to the broader sector when considering work with perpetrators, male victim's and young people. Our training is regularly updated to

ensure that we incorporate our research, practice findings and feedback from our membership.

Improving practice

a. work with perpetrators

We strongly believe in working collaboratively with other organisations in the sector and are proud to be part of several innovative projects developing new models of national significance with key sector partners.

We run a series of projects that focus on changing systems, working with communities and supporting the development of professional practice to ensure a robust response to those using abusive behaviours in their relationships.

These projects include:

- Drive Project
- Change that Lasts Perpetrator Response
- Make a Change
- Safe & Together Project
- London VAWG consortium.

b. work with young people

Over the last 12 years we have developed programmes for young people who are abusive in their intimate relationships and for adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA) with toolkits, training and other resources. We have recently invested in this work and are seeing it develop, especially in the North of England, where we support 9 organisations to run these programmes across 15 different local authority areas.

c. work with male victims

We produce a toolkit, run a training programme and hold an annual event to support specialist services in their work with male victims. In 2019 we published the Respect Male Victims Standard and are planning to begin accrediting services in 2020.

d. research and accreditation

We manage the Respect Standard which is regarded as the benchmark for work with perpetrators across the UK. We currently have 14 fully accredited specialist perpetrator organisations plus 8

which have passed stage one and 11 which are working towards accreditation.

We undertake a number of research projects alongside our direct work to develop practice.

This includes:

- Mirabal research project,
- Advance
- ReProvide

Influencing government strategy, policy and funding

Respect sits across a number of forums on a strategic and practice level to influence practice when working across the sector from a local to national policy level.

We worked closely with parliamentarians to set up an All-Party Parliamentary Group on perpetrators of domestic abuse in May 2018, which we now provide the secretariat for. This has proved a useful vehicle to raise issues with MPs and peers, particularly to inform contributions to the Domestic Abuse bill debates.

With our colleagues in the Drive partnership we led a call for action for a government perpetrator strategy in January this year. The call to action was signed by 80+ organisations (as of 12.2.20) from the specialist domestic abuse sector, the wider voluntary sector, key statutory agencies and leading academics and survivor activists.

3. Context

The past 12 years of austerity have placed local authorities and police forces in ever increasing financial strain to provide innovative services above statutory responsibilities. Faced with ever-decreasing funding, many local councils – many of whom have fixed domestic abuse budgets – are struggling just to continue to support services for survivors, let alone perpetrator services.

In addition to the impact of austerity, Brexit negotiations saw a pause on many of the funds that could have been available to the sector.

Concurrently, there is an increase in the evidence that working with those using abusive behaviours is crucial as part of the strategic response to Domestic Abuse. Across the UK, local and police authorities are recognising that it is unsafe and ineffective to only

provide support for survivors of abuse, since this fails to address the root cause of the problem. However, despite growing awareness of the need to include perpetrator work as part of their domestic abuse and VAWG strategies – as outlined in the government's new Domestic Abuse Bill – no additional money is being provided at a local level to fund such services.

4. Impact of Covid 19 including feedback from Respect's membership organisations

Perpetrators

Many perpetrators will not be managed in the way they should be. A key driver of demand is the move from group to one-to-one work which is more staff intensive. Meanwhile partner services in the statutory sector are struggling to contribute to risk management and facing new challenges, such as more limited accommodation options for perpetrators. The public urgently needs clarity that 'isolation is not excuse for abuse' and the police will still take action.

We have consulted with our membership and through our helplines:

- Majority of callers to Respect Phonenumber discuss Covid 19 and concerns on the lack of access to services and support.
- Use of social distancing/self-isolating imperatives to further abuse – some perpetrators are simply home more and therefore have more opportunity for abuse, some are using notions of isolation and quarantine to further isolate their partners.
- Some are using the challenges faced by survivors as opportunities to ingratiate themselves and relationships are being rekindled.
- Employment insecurities and money issues as a source of heightened tension – information and responses to this are being increased / improved.
- Child contact issues / changing arrangements e.g. some Victims / Survivors have expressed concern that children will not be returned after contact and that 'symptoms' will be used as a justification by perpetrators for this.

Child and Adolescent to Parent/Carer Violence and Abuse:

The experience of isolation and social distancing across a number of countries has been linked to alarming increases in abuse and violence in families, at all levels of risk. For families already affected by CAPVA, the opportunities for time away from each other are limited

leading to increased anxiety, conflict and stress. This coupled with a decrease in face to face services and support often available through schools is leading to increased risk and abuse.

Parents and other family members trying to enforce compliance with social distancing measures with their teenage children, where relationships were already strained leads to heightened levels of conflict and abuse.

Training for professionals in responding to CAPVA has not been widely available and Respect, SafeLives and others are experiencing increased demand from professionals working with families for materials and guidance on how to support families affected by CAPVA.

We know from stakeholder feedback that service providers are delivering restricted and adapted services and there is need for co-ordination of communication and messaging about responding to young people perpetrating abuse in the home. This is required across sectors including the specialist domestic abuse sector, housing, social care, children's services and criminal justice.

Recommendation

Respect needs to rapidly establish co-ordination and structure to:

- **ensure a consistent baseline of safe messaging to both parents and young people**
- **facilitate shared learning across the sector, including in risk identification and problem solving in adapting service responses in the current restrictions**
- **create routes for the amplification of messaging and awareness raising for the general public and across professional networks and sectors**

This must be adequately funded.

Male Victims

Between 16 March and 14 April, calls to Respect's Calls to the Men's Advice Line for male victims have increased by 71%, emails by 151%, webchats by 324%, and website visitors by 151%.

More male victims try to contact the helpline, doing so when they feel it is safe for them, rather than during the advertised opening hours. Demand for the Men's Advice Line is significantly higher than the availability of opening hours and Advisors. More crucially, the

content of the enquiries has become more complex. Advisors report that they spend more time with service users to meet their needs.

We have been analysing the specific needs and themes that emerge in calls and emails with Men's Advice Line Advisors since COVID-19 measures in the UK were implemented.

We have identified four broad main themes:

- increased mental health problems, including a greater number of men discussing suicide
- fear and anxiety about access to children, money, and housing situations
- belief that support services are no longer running
- feelings of isolation compounded by COVID-19

5. Helplines

Since the Covid-19 lockdown began (16.03):

- Calls to the Respect Phonenumber for perpetrators have increased by 67%, emails by 185%, webchats by 2,200% and website visitors by 581%
- Calls to the Men's Advice Line for male victims have increased by 71%, emails by 151%, webchats by 324%, and website visitors by 151%
- Increased requests for support to Respect from children's social care as to how to deal with adolescent to parent violence

Recommendation: We urgently need to be able to extend our opening hours and staffing to be able to respond to all those contacting us. We ask that the funding for the expansion of helplines be released immediately so that we can mobilise. We must enhance both the Respect Phonenumber (those using abuse, friends and family and professionals) and Men's Advice Line.

6. Preparedness in response to Covid 19 Crisis.

Many organisations have lost income streams, be that through changes to spot purchase arrangements, training and events incomes. Perpetrator services are feeling the strain as sources of income such as training dry up and many (25% of Respect members) have had to furlough staff – some have furloughed as many as 80% of staff – despite demand increases.

Organisations delivering the services face additional challenges of the impact of staff sickness and the impact of Covid 19 on their friends

and families. This ranges from changes to childcare and caring responsibilities to bereavements of loved ones.

Organisations are quickly having to change the way they work, both staff and service delivery to work in remote environments. Group work provision has most commonly become 1:1 work which is more time consuming.

Despite these challenges Respect and our members are committed to mobilising quickly to be able to adapt to the circumstances and create resources, campaigns and capacity to be able to respond. This is where we have faced one of our most significant challenges, despite decreased income and the impact on staff we have had to produce and provide more. Significant delays in funding announcements and support from government have blocked our agility to be able to mobilise. For example, we have had to furlough some staff what we vitally need to retain to meet some of this work but cannot because we have not had funding decisions quickly enough.

Recommendation: We urgently need funding channelled into the sector to enable us to respond to the current crisis and then be able to respond to the 'fall out'. The Domestic Abuse and Victims Commissioners must be involved in planning the immediate and longer-term response. Without knowledge on the timeframes, scale and likelihood of this funding we are unable to plan for our response.

Respect has launched a campaign #NoExcuseForAbuse in the expectation that some perpetrators will use the lockdown to further control their partners and to raise awareness of support available. Perpetrators are not a homogenous group, some are aware of their behaviour and want to change, and the campaign helps publicise the Respect Helpline for this group and also send clear and consistent messages to anyone impacted by the perpetration of abuse (communities, friends and family, survivors, children).

Recommendation: We urgently ask that the application to support our campaign be recognised and awarded so that we are able to develop this more fully and reach out to those using abuse, those impacted, to male victims and child/adolescent to parent/carer violence and abuse.

7. The future

We are particularly concerned about the time after lockdown ends. We anticipate that the way people seek help and report abuse will

change significantly and there will be an additional, and new demand placed on services.

For example:

- Many people will be in a position to report abuse they have experienced during these times
- More people using abusive behaviours will try to access support
- The additional stresses we see now such as mental health, finances and so on will continue as we enter into an uncertain economic climate with enduring hardships on many.
- There may be an increased demand on accommodation services as we support survivors and/or perpetrators to move from their family homes
- Should we see an increase in separations, this represents an increase in some of the more risk fuelled periods for survivors in terms of domestic homicides and serious incidents
- Some relationships may have been re-kindled due to the pressures of lock down, financial, emotional and or controlling behaviours. These relationships may endure and will need more support or may end which further increases risk.
- We know that there are delays in trial dates and longer bail dates being set, this will continue to impact on those experiencing abuse.
- Some Criminal Justice options are not available or being repurposed this means that people are unable to receive support now and this will potentially continue into the future
- There are significant tensions with child contact and access. The impacts of lockdown will continue into the future with the need for further intervention.