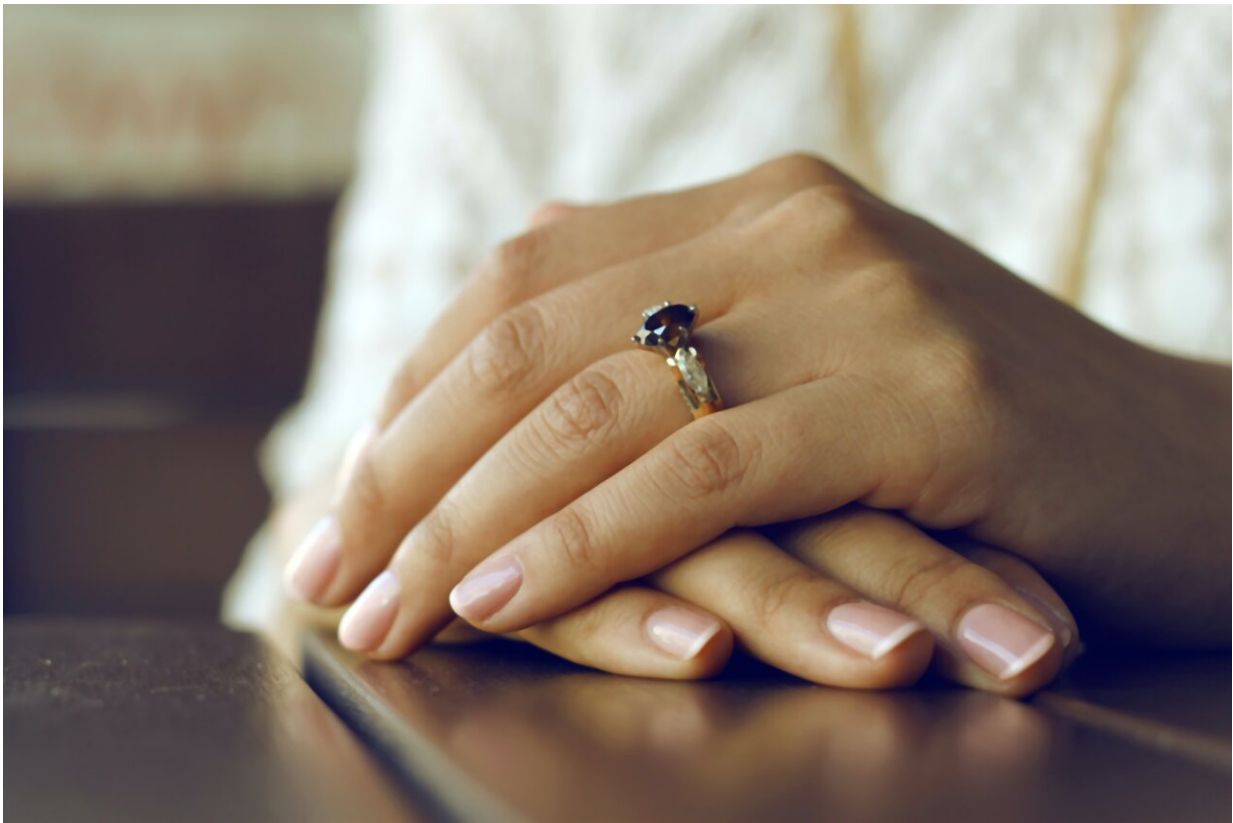


More accessible domestic abuse services needed across the UK, research shows

December 22 2021



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A new report on the provision of domestic abuse services in the UK under COVID-19 has highlighted the need for more accessible services.

The research highlighted how, during the pandemic, the domestic [abuse](#) sector in the UK pivoted rapidly to the remote delivery of services in order to meet increased and increasingly complex demands.

Led by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), the work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19.

The continued value of hybrid and face-to-face [support](#) services in reducing barriers to domestic abuse support was emphasized in the report with many victims benefiting from them. However, remote services were not equally accessible for all.

In particular, the research highlighted an inadequate provision of support services for several groups, including those with complex needs, in rural communities, black and ethnic minority groups, male victims, older survivors and children and young people living with domestic abuse.

Gaps in domestic abuse provision during the pandemic were attributed to a range of factors including closures of housing services, schools and courts, digital poverty, increased levels of mental health needs, and language barriers. More targeted funding, along with more flexible and rapid funding application processes, were found to be key to closing these gaps.

"The pandemic has emphasized the need for all sectors and services to contribute to the task of responding to domestic abuse"

The research revealed that over the last year, public messages and media coverage have increased public and government awareness of domestic abuse. However, messages need to be consistent—domestic abuse victims were initially influenced by the call to stay at home before the government changed its messaging. Researchers also recommended that

resources are publicized wherever possible including at vaccination and testing centers.

The research follows a significant increase in demand for domestic abuse services across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Women's Aid June 2020 Provider Survey highlighted that of 22 online support services, 90 percent had seen an increase in demand, with 81 percent of 31 telephone support services also witnessing high levels of calls.

Refuge, who operate a national domestic abuse helpline in England, also saw a 22 percent increase in calls to their [service](#) in the year ending March 2021, compared to the previous year (ONS, 2021a), with a 700 percent increase in individuals accessing their website between April and June 2020 (ONS, 2020).

UCLan's Nicky Stanley, Professor of Social Work and lead author, said: "The pandemic has emphasized the need for all sectors and services to contribute to the task of responding to domestic abuse. Restrictions have prompted a widespread reflection on the experience of being confined to an abusive environment, and this broader awareness has sparked many examples of innovative interventions from a wide range of organizations and groups.

"However, domestic abuse services interlock with other services and the shutdown of housing services and delays in the justice system have increased demands on domestic abuse services and create blockages in refuges. Likewise, school closures meant that many children living with domestic abuse became invisible to services. All public services need to take account of domestic abuse in responding to the pandemic and other such crises."

Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and

Wales added: "This research has highlighted some key issues which [domestic abuse](#) victims faced during COVID including gaps in support services for several groups including Black and minoritized survivors.

"I am calling on the Government to create a dedicated funding pot of £262.9m over three years for specialist 'by and for' services that provide the most tailored support for marginalized survivors including LGBT+, Deaf, disabled and Black and minoritized victims as well as migrant victims and survivors."

Provided by University of Central Lancashire

Citation: More accessible domestic abuse services needed across the UK, research shows (2021, December 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-12-accessible-domestic-abuse-uk.html>

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