

Report: The impact of lockdown on domestic abuse service providers

March 28 2023, by Heidi Pullig



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The COVID-19 lockdowns, which began on March 23, 2020, brought

overnight changes in working conditions for millions of people all over the world. Domestic abuse service providers (DASPs) were one group of frontline workers who had to navigate remote working during lockdown home-life as they continued acting as a source of safety and security for those at elevated risk of harm.

Domestic abuse has long been recognized as a major socio-legal and public health issue that affects one in three women globally. In the pre-pandemic year ending March 2019, over a third (35%) of the 1,671,039 violence against the person offenses recorded by the police in England and Wales were [domestic abuse](#)-related.

During the lockdowns, U.K. domestic abuse charities reported surging numbers of current and former victims accessing services, with spikes of up to 200% reported. DASPs were faced with the unenviable task of managing this growth in demand, coupled alongside acclimatizing to the new design and delivery of their service in the wake of COVID-related restrictions.

While the news headlines rightly focused on the risk for domestic abuse victims, the conditions and capacity of service providers to support growing demand were largely absent from this concern. Delivering vital domestic abuse support and assistance was made more challenging by having undertake such important work via a smartphone or computer screen, rather than face to face.

Dr. Marian Duggan, and her colleagues from Kent and the University of Greenwich, were concerned about the impact of [lockdown](#) working conditions on DASPs' personal and professional well-being during this chaotic time, especially as pre-pandemic studies had highlighted high rates of stress, burnout, and vicarious traumatization among frontline crisis practitioners.

Dr. Duggan sought to understand how DASPs coped (or didn't cope) during the lockdowns by conducting a case-study of a domestic abuse charity, which involved interviewing approximately 30 employees about their experiences. The results are documented within "Finding Strength in Compassion—Domestic Abuse Service Providers and the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Her findings illustrated that participants found working during the lockdowns challenging—but, when given the capacity to be properly supported by their specialist organization and colleagues, domestic abuse service providers drew strength and resilience in the face of adversity, managing to thrive personally and professionally. This support involves, but is not limited to, acknowledging and valuing efforts, flexibility, encouraging autonomy, demonstrating trust, and investing in staff welfare and well-being.

From their research, Dr. Duggan and her colleagues are seeking seeks to inform government to better support DASPs by:

- Being alert to the considerable variability of victims' needs (and specialists' support). Targets and metrics do not convey the considerable time and investment many specialists dedicate to victims with additional or complex needs, or in acute crisis.
- Encouraging and enabling resources for specialist supervision: As the demand for domestic abuse services continues to grow, a wider range of organizations are training and recruiting in-house domestic abuse specialists to provide responsive and/or outreach services. Domestic abuse organizations should be financially supported to provide specialist supervision for newly trained domestic abuse specialists who are not affiliated to a domestic abuse organization.
- Investing in domestic [abuse](#) services. In addition to funding recruitment and training, funding should also be made available

for initiatives and activities which address specialists' welfare and well-being in a proactive (as well as responsive) fashion.

More information: Finding Strength in Compassion—Domestic Abuse Service Providers and the COVID-19 Pandemic:

[projectdasp.org/wp-content/upl ... 3/03/DASP-Report.pdf](https://projectdasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/DASP-Report.pdf)

More information on Project DASP can be found at [DASP—Domestic Abuse Service Providers \(projectdasp.org\)](https://projectdasp.org)

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