



Surrey Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment

Domestic Abuse Rapid Needs Assessment –
Findings from Survivor Interviews

Executive summary

In the period between July and August 2020, Surrey County Council ran a series of interviews with stakeholders from the Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership to understand their views on the impact of covid19 and the March 2020 lockdown on the Surrey domestic abuse (DA) response system and on DA victims/survivors. The findings from those interviews are reported in the [DA chapter of the Surrey Community Impact Assessment](#) (CIA).

At the time, given that lockdown events were still rather fresh and survivors were in the initial stages of getting support and moving on from their recent experience of abuse, it was deemed unsafe to engage directly with them to listen to their voices and get their views on recent events, as this might have interfered with their recovery journey.

However, the DA chapter of the Surrey CIA set out important lines of enquiry to be investigated directly with survivors at a later stage, and from the end of September 2020 Surrey County Council started approaching survivors for interviews about their experience before and during lockdown. This report offers an analysis of the findings from this second wave of interviews, and sets out recommendations for the different agencies and organisations involved in supporting survivors in their recovery based on the experience survivors have told us about.

The research team spoke to seventeen survivors recruited through Surrey outreach and refuge services about their experiences. While striving for diversity, recruiting organisations were unable to recruit men, foreign nationals, people over the age of 60, people who experienced abuse outside of the context of a romantic relationship and people who experienced abuse in the context of a homosexual relation. The views and experiences of these groups are therefore not represented in this report, and further engagement will be required to obtain a clearer picture including the voices of the above categories.

The volunteers involved in this work talked to us about their circumstances pre-lockdown and during lockdown, how they came to receive specialist DA support and what they thought of the support they received. We discussed missed opportunities and things that could be done differently in the future to ensure victims and survivors are supported better or earlier.

A series of recommendations was developed as a result of those discussions, which is included in the table below. These are distinguished between single agency and partnership recommendations (based on their position in the chart), as well as the circumstances they are relevant to, i.e. general recommendations and lockdown-specific recommendations (lighter colour/thin border box and darker colour/thicker border box respectively).

Surrey Domestic Abuse Response System – recommendations for preparedness

Surrey County Council

1. Train all staff to identify and respond appropriately DA, with priority given to social and housing workers
2. Include DA-specific support in the Early Help offer to compensate for the impact of DA on children and young people

Surrey Police

1. Ensure accurate records of existing restraining orders are available to all police stations across Surrey
2. Train police officers to understand how lockdown-related regulations might be exploited by perpetrators

Health

1. Train all staff to ask appropriate questions about DA, with priority to patient-facing staff
2. consider adding IDVAs in all Surrey hospitals
3. include a DA "flag" in self-service booking systems so victims can let GPs know the health concern they want to discuss is DA-related

Outreach

1. Consider digital solutions to offer videocalls instead of phone calls where it is safe to do so

Refuges

1. Expand support offer to include career advice for guests who need to retrain/acquire economic independence
2. Expand capacity to accommodate survivors with children

Family Court / Justice system

1. Consider the appropriateness of contact with children via phone/videocalls as the perpetrator will gain access to the victim's home environment
2. Train judges to consider the appropriateness of remote proceedings and mitigating actions to support victims

Actions for all agencies/organisations

1. Seek to engage with groups of survivors not represented in this report, most notably with men, foreign nationals, people over the age of 60, people in homosexual relationships and survivors who were not in a romantic relationship with the perpetrator
2. Ensure that professionals supporting a victim have access to shared files including the most recent updates from all agencies

3. Promote the inclusion of DA as a topic in the curriculum of Surrey schools, with particular reference to coercive control
4. Continue to raise awareness of DA through public campaigns with the use of traditional media as well as social media, including details of how victims can seek support
5. Consider demand, capacity and funding for refuges and children's outreach services to enable survivors and their dependants to access support

6. Tackle isolation, particularly for categories considered at increased risk of isolation through the fostering of groups around common interests
7. Achieve 100% DA training for old and new staff through shared learning (e.g. through the Surrey Children's Academy). Higher priority should be given to training staff in customer facing roles
8. Actively encourage local organisations (e.g. places of work, voluntary organisations) to train their staff to recognise domestic abuse

9. Train staff to consider any new lockdowns and a more restrictive lifestyle as catalysts of change in the context of domestic abuse situations: while change is likely to determine a worsening of the victim's experience of abuse, it might also represent an opportunity for agencies to become involved, spot signs of abuse and offer support.

10. For any new lockdown, each agency should ask specialist DA services to carefully consider the potential repercussions of individual restrictions and regulations on survivors, and train agency staff to anticipate how perpetrators might potentially exploit them to their advantage

Introduction

In the period between July and August 2020, Surrey County Council ran a series of interviews with stakeholders from the Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership to understand their views on the impact of covid19 and the March 2020 lockdown on the Surrey domestic abuse (DA) response system and on DA victims/survivors. The findings from those interviews are reported in the [DA chapter of the Surrey Community Impact Assessment](#) (CIA).

At the time, given that lockdown events were still rather fresh and survivors were in the initial stages of getting support and moving on from their recent experience of abuse, it was deemed unsafe to engage directly with them to listen to their voices and get their views on recent events, as this might have interfered with their recovery journey.

However, the DA chapter of the Surrey CIA set out important lines of enquiry to be investigated directly with survivors at a later stage, and from the end of September 2020 Surrey County Council started approaching survivors for interviews about their experience before and during lockdown. This report offers an analysis of the findings from this second wave of interviews, and sets out recommendations for the different agencies and organisations involved in supporting survivors in their recovery based on the experience survivors have told us about.

Based on the feedback from stakeholders and the lines of inquiry delineated in the DA chapter of the Surrey CIA, the structure of the survivor interviews focused on:

1. Beginning of the relationship with the abuser and first signs of abuse
2. Circumstances before lockdown
3. Circumstances during lockdown
4. Accessing help and support during lockdown
5. Missed opportunities for support
6. What could be done differently in the future

Specifically in terms of point 3, the approach to interviews sought to investigate specific topics stakeholders mentioned in terms of impact of lockdown on survivors (more intense/severe abuse, reduced access to (in-person) support, new instances of abuse related directly to the pandemic, lack of clarity from agencies in managing challenges posed by lockdown and new ways of working, impact on children and young people in the family – see section 5 of the main DA chapter of the Surrey CIA).

Survivors were recruited through the Surrey DA outreach and refuge services among people who had started receiving support from their service between 23 March and 23 July 2020. The reason for this time bracket is that the **purpose of the interviews was to capture the views of survivors who had experienced abuse during lockdown**, while at the same time ensuring that they had been receiving support with their circumstances for at least two months before being interviewed. Services were asked to recruit potential participants based on their professional judgement of the survivor's ability to talk about their experience without this impacting negatively on their recovery journey. While this approach will have excluded the views of particularly vulnerable survivors, the safety of the survivors themselves was deemed the highest priority. Further interviews might be carried out in the future to expand our knowledge of DA in lockdown conditions, and these will hopefully include a larger and more diverse cohort.

In terms of diversity, providers were asked to seek to recruit as diverse a cohort as possible in terms of:

- Age
- Gender
- Nationality
- Surrey boroughs of residence at the time of the interview
- Ethnic background

At the same time, it was acknowledged that efforts to achieve diversity in the cohort could be limited due to the size of the overall cohort meeting the requirements of the study, and within that the survivors' individual willingness to engage with the work.

The resulting cohort of interviewees comprised of **eighteen volunteers** who:

- are between the age of 17 and 56
- are all women
- all declare British nationality
- are of White British descent in 83% of cases, with other backgrounds being Black African (11%), Asian (5.5%) and Mixed – White and Asian (5.5%)
- live in nine out of the eleven Surrey Districts and Boroughs (Waverley 22%, Elmbridge and Guildford 17% each, Runnymede and Surrey Heath 11% each, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Spelthorne and Tandridge 5.5% each)

The absence of men, foreign nationals, and people over the age of 60 means the views of these groups are not represented in this report. Efforts to recruit participants for further work will have to take note of this outcome and potentially target those categories specifically, or at the very least investigate reasons that might be preventing those categories from participating.

The remainder of this report is organized according to the themes identified at the beginning of the chapter, and it includes survivor voices throughout. Some quotes in the report have been edited for clarity and to protect the survivor's anonymity. An additional section entitled "appreciation of support" collects the survivor's expressions of gratitude for the difference services have made to their life. **The last section summarises the main recommendations deriving from the analysis** of the interviews with survivors.

1. Beginning of the relationship with the abuser and first signs of abuse

All survivors interviewed identified as females; 89% reported that they had (had) a romantic relationship with the abuser, while the other two were witnesses of abuse perpetrated by a male on a female family member (mother or daughter) in the context of a romantic relationship. On this basis, **the views of survivors whose abuser was not a (former) partner are not included.** All survivors whose abuser was the (former) partner were in a heterosexual relationship, meaning that **experience of abuse in homosexual relationships is also not represented in this report.**

The most recent relationship had started in 2019, while the oldest was from the late 1990s. Often the women being abused had been in a relationship for many years until recently, although some women had not been in a relationship with their abusive ex-partner or husband for some time, yet were still receiving abuse and were at risk of further abuse. This shows how domestic abuse can impact people of all ages, with consequences potential spanning over decades and resurfacing long after the relationship has been ended.

Most of the women we interviewed described the relationships with their abuser as unstable or somewhat problematic from the beginning or close to the beginning.

I knew something wasn't a hundred percent, but I didn't know what it was... And then it must have been a few months after we got married... I found out that he had had affairs.

we got together when I was [very young]. Then we left it, and then two years later we got back together. Then he contacted me [again]. ***Kept contacting, kept contacting and I ignored. And then for one random moment I thought I'll reply.*** I replied, met him, slept with him and then fell pregnant, and he came into my life from then on.

[I realised something was wrong a] couple of months after we'd been together, I suppose. I was in quite a vulnerable point in my life when I met him. I've never been in an abusive relationship before, and ***because I was quite vulnerable I think I kinda let him get away with stuff that I wouldn't normally do,*** and then you just get more ground down.

Women spoke of being in a vulnerable position when the abuse started or intensified. This included experiencing health and financial problems or going through a bereavement.

Women often reported to not realising the abuse was abuse straight away. Many of them attributed this to either their lack of experience of what "good" looks like in a relationship (particularly younger survivors) or a lack of a social network for them to compare experiences with, especially in connection with not being employed. Where women said they were aware that the relationship was not "good", they attributed their unwillingness to end it to other circumstances in their life that made them vulnerable, to love and concern for the partner, to fear for their own personal or financial wellbeing or to a desire to maintain the integrity of their relationship/household, particularly if they had children. The abuse was described as increasing gradually until it was normalised.

My dad had recently died. ***So I think that it was a very very hard time.*** I don't think I was thinking as logically as you would.

Within our whole relationship, I've always known that he had mental health issues, but ***was always led to believe by him and his family that we would all work at it together.*** And there were reasons for it, and we would have the right support.

And one time I did think about leaving him.... But I knew I couldn't because I was stuck. ***I was totally financially dependent on him.***

You're in love with them. It's hard to put it away and the things they say to you and the controlling of it all, ***making you feel like you're the only person in the world they need and that they're sorry.*** And, you know, in the beginning, you forgive them.

2. Circumstances before lockdown

Ten interviewees lived with their perpetrator in the period immediately preceding the 23 March 2020 lockdown. Households typically included any children and stepchildren (from babies to adult children), who were often witness to the abuse and sometimes involved in it. Less commonly, women also received aggression from other people in the household, such as children being physically or verbally aggressive towards them.

Survivors who were still in a relationship/living together with their perpetrators often reported that the relationship was already strained before lockdown. Types of abuse they experienced were financial, emotional, physical and sexual, with a large majority reporting coercive control and at least one more type of specific abuse. Women and their families were also often involved with professional services such as social services, mental health services and family courts. While the involvement of

services was overall characterised as positive, in some cases it constituted an additional pressure on the survivor with an unclear added value.

We had seven social workers I think altogether. **And there was one social worker who said there's a non-molestation order in place, you shouldn't be having meetings together [with the perpetrator]. And then maybe a week later, I got an email saying, so this is the date of the meeting [with the perpetrator].**

For five women the relationship had already ended before lockdown and they were no longer living with the perpetrator, in some cases for several years, but were still receiving abuse. This came in the form of interferences in their family's life, stalking, harassment and threats of abuse. In one case, this had led the survivor to attempt to hide her new work location from her ex-partner for fear that this interference might reach her new place of employment, representing a continuation of the abuse several years beyond the end of the relationship.

I started work for a new company... **So I tried to constantly keep it hidden, but he [the perpetrator] found out.**

Two women who spoke to us were not directly affected by the violence, but witnessed the violence being perpetrated on a family member while not living with the perpetrator.

3. Circumstances during lockdown

The sudden "change of gear" in family life due to the lockdown restrictions had a varied and nuanced impact on survivors, perpetrators and their families. The first and perhaps most obvious is the requirement for survivors to spend more time at home with their perpetrator, having been furloughed, working from home or working fewer hours and being generally under a "stay home" order. In some cases, the very threat of this prospect was what motivated victims to seek and obtain support just before lockdown.

I had reported a couple of incidents before. So the final time that I reported it, **I was advised to get an order because of course, literally coronavirus was going to be on our doorstep, and for us to all live in the same house and be confined in a lockdown situation was not going to be an option, not for anyone's mental health and emotional well-being. It would have destroyed each and every one of us.**

Women felt that lockdown caused the perpetrator's behaviour to change. In some cases, lockdown meant a worsening of the abuse, driven by factors such as more time for the perpetrator to impose their behaviour on survivors, fewer opportunities for survivors and perpetrators to remove themselves from escalating arguments, the perpetrator's mental health deteriorating and financial pressures on the family. Survivors reported that anxiety around coronavirus made the perpetrator more controlling, but also that lockdown caused boredom which led to more abuse. Overall, **survivors reported a sense that lockdown highlighted and exacerbated previously existing patterns of behaviour.** Women also spoke of how lockdown made the abuse scarier and increased the fear they experienced of not being able to get away from the perpetrator.

He hadn't been working. So I think he was bored. ***I think boredom plays a lot of because they don't know what else to do.*** And of course because abusers are quite narcissistic I think they always think that you're up to something, even though you're not, and it plays on their mind. And obviously it gets worse and worse and worse.

It got to the point where I couldn't have a conversation in the house. ***I had to keep taking my dog out for a walk and then he was questioning where I was going, who I was speaking to.*** He was searching through my stuff in the house.

I knew there was something not quite right, but ***it just became more apparent throughout lockdown.***

The abuse has gone crazy bad, which has been scary. ***I think, because the abuse has got a lot worse, and it's in lockdown, it has made it more scary.***

Being in lockdown you can't just go out and run to family or friends or police because you're too scared. You're scared to do that.

Other interviewees reported that lockdown meant their partner's behaviour did not necessarily deteriorate, but that **lockdown meant a change in the forms of abuse they were experiencing**. In some cases this meant that perhaps controlling behaviours decreased slightly, as their abuser knew exactly where they were at all times. In others it granted survivors a sense of increased safety, but it also meant that the perpetrator adapted their behaviour to continue abusing in spite lockdown circumstances.

He was a bit more at ease because I didn't go out anywhere where I was. I was sat at home with my child. ***He sort of enjoyed the pleasure that it was lockdown and there was nowhere to go.***

He kept saying [on the phone to the child] "No, what's the [new item] you've got?". And that alarmed [the child] and me, because it had just arrived. The only way he would have known that we had a [new item] was if he was walking by [during lockdown]. ***And I was really then scared, but [...] I couldn't have anybody come in to check. You know, to check everywhere. So yeah, lockdown was a different kind of stress, but then it also was almost like a fortress of safety.***

3.1 Types of abuse suffered

Women talked about experiencing physical, emotional and financial abuse, both before and during lockdown. This included physical and verbal assault, threatening behaviour, gaslighting, controlling behaviour and rape. The abuse was often witnessed by children in the household, especially when they were home due to schools being shut, and some abusive behaviours were directed towards children.

Financial abuse committed by the perpetrator included refusing to pay bills or buy food and benefits fraud. For women no longer in a relationship with the perpetrator, this involved a refusal to pay child maintenance or school fees. Women reported that this type of abuse tended to be more common during lockdown than before.

Women spoke of questioning their own behaviour and wondering if they were to blame. They experienced feeling low, scared and suicidal during this time. Women also talked about the isolation they felt as a result of the abuse. They spoke of being isolated from their friends and family; for

example, controlling behaviour from the perpetrator encouraged them not go out or see friends, and people were not welcome at the house. This was compounded by lockdown, when some families were shielding, not working or allowing visitors in the home. It was more difficult to talk to friends and family, which further isolated them.

I mean ***I have phoned Samaritans once during this time as well. I have had, I've been very low.*** And I have found it very difficult because I love my husband and I couldn't believe that this is what he was doing to me.

I couldn't leave my house, obviously, in a lockdown, I have nowhere to go. Didn't go to my family... so have, having it in a lockdown, there wasn't much support out there.

New forms of abuse emerged that were directly related to the opportunities afforded by the lockdown. The survivor was easier to locate and monitor and covid19 regulations could be exploited to exclude the survivor from family life. Where agencies were unclear about how regulations should be applied, especially at the beginning of the lockdown, this created opportunities for the survivor to exploit the intervention of agencies in incidents as an additional weapon in their arsenal. Covid19 itself caused anxiety for families and some needed to shield, further increasing their isolation. For families where parents had split up, this restricted perpetrator access to their children on one side, but as contact needed to happen via telephone or videoconferencing instead, this was said to give perpetrators a window in the survivor's home environment.

My [child] was on the phone to [their] dad and he asked how [activity] was going. [The child] said, "I haven't been at school for weeks, I have not been [activity]". ***He kept saying "No, what's the [new item] you've got?". And that alarmed [the child] and me, because it had just arrived. [...] The only way he would have known that we had a [new item] was if he was walking by [during lockdown]. Or if he'd gone there to look.***

Because of covid, [the police] didn't really know where they stood on saying "Well, you have to let her back in [her own home]". His reasons were, [...] "I don't want her in the house for 14 days until she's self-isolated", but I couldn't self-isolate, I had nowhere to go [...]. ***The police said, you know, they've seen it so much, a lot of people have been using covid-19 as an excuse to do things like this, to lock people out of their houses and stuff like that.***

I am a key worker. [...] My children were left home alone, he was really really, ***he was constantly calling and texting my son,*** and then my son would be phoning me at work, I had to keep my phone all the time. [Later] I was able to work from home and again he was calling and texting and everything like that, and really angry, which would affect also the children's behaviour. ***He could just be outside, he would say he was going to take my son and would not be bringing him back, you know, using covid as an excuse. That sort of thing. [...] It got to the point where my son was so scared he kept dialling 999 all the time.***

4. Accessing help and support during lockdown

This section reports on the victim's experience of seeking support during lockdown. It is important to note that for the women currently living at Surrey refuges, some had previously lived in other local authority areas; therefore some of the experiences of seeking support discussed in this report were in

the context of other local authorities (where this is the case, the quotation is marked with a blue background), but still have important lessons for Surrey.

Routes into receiving help and support from outreach services and refuges were varied for the women we spoke with. Firstly, some interviewees reported that it was unclear where you should go to access support. Some women were aware of Women's Aid and domestic abuse services, but others did not know what support was available or how to get in touch with services specifically for domestic abuse.

In some cases, **professionals or services were already working with the family**, so they were a route via which domestic abuse could be identified without the victim coming forward.

Social services rung me and said "we've had a referral". I told him, he didn't believe me. He thought I was making it all up just to get away from him. And I said, "you can speak to the social worker, **they found out, I need to go**". **So then I left.**

In other cases, **women had had previous involvement with social services, mental health practitioners, the police and domestic abuse services**. Their previous experience with seeking/receiving support from agencies and organisations meant they were aware of the support they could receive to help them deal with their circumstances, and felt able to do so when needed. It was typically a change in the type of abuse that led to women seeking additional support. For example, a woman had started receiving support for domestic abuse before lockdown, but during lockdown requested additional support for their child who became significantly more affected by the abuse.

And then as things got worse with my [child] **when [they] got impacted by the abuse again and it got really worse for [them]. That's when I made contact with [outreach service].**

However, for other women lockdown was the first time they had to reach out for support, and they cited increased anxiety and fears for their safety which led them to reach out for help. For these women the routes into receiving support were less straightforward; in some cases, the women

So I contacted the council and I did it under the domestic abuse thing online, **but it took them two and a half weeks to call me back**. And then someone did call me back, but it wasn't anyone that was properly trained. It was just one of the girls that works on the housing department, and she didn't really know how to help me.

phoned specialist domestic abuse organisations directly themselves after finding out about them on the internet. At least one woman tried to get in touch with her council to access support, but she experienced delays in hearing back and was not put in touch with the appropriate professionals or support.

For some women, **recommendations or referrals from a professional (such as a counsellor), the police or social services were made directly to outreach services and refuges**, usually as a result of an incident. When the police were involved, this also offered an opportunity for women to be separated from the perpetrator and seek help from the justice system, outreach services or refuges themselves. Until support was signposted or suggested by

professionals (as well as friends or family), some women were unaware that they were being abused, and of their options in terms of support.

I think it was a case of the police had contacted them because they were worried about, you know, sort of controlling behaviour. We also had social services involved... ***the other authorities had kind of contacted the domestic abuse outreach and given them my details.***

After he was arrested, a police officer came the next day and she talked to me. I just thought we were having a chat. She was just asking me questions about our relationship. And, you know, kind of what led up to the incident the day before and how things were. And at that time, I hadn't heard of coercive control. I didn't you know, I didn't know about it, in my mind then domestic abuse was just physical. I didn't really know about it.

And then when it came to applying for the non-molestation order, I wanted somebody to read through my witness statement and help me understand that, and I got that support. ***I think they were like, "if the police have encouraged you to do this, then you should really do this".***

It is important to note that in at least one case it took more than one attempt for the survivor to be referred to the correct support services and start receiving the support they needed.

I contacted the social services and explained to them what had happened. And I had to do that twice. And then obviously from then they got me a support worker and she got put in touch with the domestic violence outreach team.

In addition, **some women also raised issues with accessing refuges.** During lockdown there were mixed experiences of trying to access a refuge; one woman reported being given regular updates about availability of refuge spaces, but another needed to chase for updates. In one case where a refuge space was not available immediately, emergency accommodation was provided for several nights. One interviewee said that she had tried to find a refuge space before lockdown, but none could accommodate her and her children.

About a year before I really wanted to go. ***I was desperate to leave him and I tried to find a refuge, but I couldn't find anywhere that would take myself and my children.***

And then [Women's Aid advisor] gave me this e-mail address of someone that was supposed to be looking for refuges for me, and ***I had to keep chasing her up because she was supposed to do it at 10 o'clock every day. They're supposed to come on the system and supposed to check them, but she wasn't doing it.***

4.1 Types of support received

It is important to note that the role of statutory agencies or support services in the context of helping this cohort of interviewees often had an educational element in terms of providing the survivors with the tools to recognize their experience as one of abuse, often in the form of new vocabulary and concepts they had not heard before. **Coercive control featured prominently among the concepts survivors stated they were unfamiliar with before external intervention.** Even younger interviewees who had clear and recent memories of their school curriculum stated that this concept was not covered in their education, and they wish they had received more guidance in this area.

And then when I came into refuge, I was still under, as I know now, under his control. So, for the first month that I was in refuge, there was still contact because I was worried for my family's safety... **After a month of being here, I'd done work, I'd figured out what was going on. I learned that he had so much coercive control, as they told me it was.**

My support worker was amazing. **She was actually the one that made me realise that it was controlling behaviour.**

Social work often represented a gateway to receiving specialist domestic abuse support. Social services were either asked to get involved by the survivor/a relative of the survivor, or identified a domestic abuse situation and ensured the victim got support, especially where the perpetrator was identified as a danger to the survivor and her children. It is important to note that the involvement of social services was not always successful in supporting the survivor, sometimes representing an additional requirement and strain for the survivor.

[Social services] said they had a referral... she said can a duty worker come round to see me and my child....And then obviously **I spoke to my worker and they mentioned the refuge.**

[During lockdown] I was still getting the "we'll come in, we have to do unannounced visits, we're coming to see you". But you can't come in [due to shielding], and almost being made to feel like you're not cooperating.

The police also represented an important gateway for information, signposting and advice, on top of the direct interventions they delivered when called out to attend to an incident. Several survivors mentioned asking the police for help and support, even before any incident that eventually led to the police being called out to their home. While intervention from the police was generally characterised as positive, it is important to highlight instances where the survivor could have received better support. The two instances reported by survivors in this respect relate to uncertainty in applying covid19 regulations and a gap in the data available to the police that meant they could not escalate a situation where a survivor reported their perpetrator flouting their restraining order.

He locked me out, and refused to let me back in [...] **He said "you're not coming back in, you need to isolate for 14 days then I'll let you back in"...** Then I spoke to the police in the morning... They went to the house, they tried to speak with him. He obviously wouldn't let them in and he was worried I was trying to get back into the house [...] **And there was not really anything the police could do about it.**

Well, it was a bit of a disaster to be honest, because they never had the paperwork to say that he wasn't allowed in that area. **I had to take myself down to the police station and show them all the paperwork that I had on my phone, because they couldn't find any paperwork to say that he wasn't allowed there... they really weren't interested. By the end of the weekend, I was losing it because I was so scared.**

Women and their families received a variety of support from local and national outreach services and refuges. This included advice on how to respond and deal with perpetrators when they were still in the relationship, support with completing the documentation necessary to obtain non-molestation orders where the relationship had just been ended, counselling and help with understanding their experience and moving on after achieving a more settled post-relationship state. Women said they found this type of advice helpful and it helped them manage contact better. Women also had the opportunity to take part in the Freedom programme as well as other support programmes. These programmes were credited with helping women understand what abuse can look like and that the abuse was not their fault, but also to come to terms with what had happened to them. There was only one interview where room for improvement from outreach services was identified, although this might be due to the means of recruitment.

I've been given the opportunity to do the **Freedom programme**. And I did the whole course. And I passed. It tells you about all the different kinds of perpetrators there are... and it lets you express anything that you want to express. And then you think 'oh what, he did that to me'. And then the other girls, 'well that's what my partner did to me'... **The best thing I've done in a group... You can either share or you don't, and I found it easy to share so that I could get it out in the open. So I'm not keeping it to myself.**

[Outreach support worker] was helping me navigate through [contact with perpetrator] and **she's given me the confidence that I don't actually have to reply, I've always just been scared if I don't reply.**

My support worker obviously was pushing on **getting counselling quicker...** and my domestic abuse person would **talk to me about it and make me understand**, as she is a specialist in it.

They gave me all the documentation I needed to complete, it took me a long time to do it, it was quite in-depth because we had to go back over time and have it all correct. But they checked it for me and it was submitted...to court.

Support was also provided to children. This included the Freedom programme for young people, but children who witnessed abuse were also provided with support. Children who were more directly involved in the domestic abuse received more intensive support, both in a one-to-one and group setting. Women said this support was critical to helping their children come to terms with the abusive situation, and noted that often the support worker was the only person their child would open up to about how they felt. It is important to note that often the effect of the abuse on children or their relationship with their children was cited as an important factor in the survivor deciding whether to

seek support at all, and on this basis it is paramount that children receive adequate support also as a way to encourage the parent on their own recovery process.

I know when I first contacted [domestic abuse services] I gave them my situation and I said I was worried because my children were becoming very affected and I was worried about their safety. Because sometimes [the perpetrator] would come in and he would completely ignore them, and mentally, that is just awful. I can't put into words how it felt at that time to be honest. But I was desperately desperate to try and stop him having access to be able to behave in such a bad way to his own children.

She just feels so supported that she's got someone who you know, it's just really nice. ***I can just tell she feels that she's not alone and she feels understood and validated.***

Women generally reported no difficulties in the availability of virtual/telephone outreach support during lockdown or their ability to access this type of help, although heavy caseloads of support workers were noted. Telephone calls instead of face to face meetings took place during lockdown, and survivors maintained regular contact with their support worker at outreach services. At least one survivor reported a desire to be able to at least switch from telephone to videocalls with their outreach worker, as lockdown circumstances had meant they were only able to text/speak on the phone, and she felt she would have benefited from being able to at least see the person who gave her support if meeting them face to face was not an option.

If wasn't for covid, I would be meeting [caseworker], so I would be having that one to one contact... ***To perhaps be able to have Teams or Zoom calls with your caseworker, because again, it's that face to face thing...*** I do feel like I have a good rapport with [caseworker], she understands, she completely gets it and she's fantastic. But it would be lovely to have that connection.

Interviewees residing in refuges were happy about the support they received. Refuges provided them with safe accommodation, support with claiming benefits and housing, access to therapy, help with practicalities and more.

They all do make me feel a lot better about things that are going on... I feel at ease talking to them and obviously they got me in touch with a counsellor that works for them.

So now I'm here, I feel very safe in this town. The doctors are absolutely fantastic and they've been great with my mental health support... so they've been really good, ***so I feel very comfortable and mentally great being here.***

Career advice was quoted as important support for victims in recovering from financial loss and shaping a new life. While this is currently not being consistently offered by refuges, at least one survivor feels this would be fundamental for her to move on to independence.

Well, I think what can really be done is probably listen to us, we the victims of domestic violence, as in ***what we really want to do career wise, because I really want to work...*** And I've been thinking about what I can really do effectively because I've been working in one industry, but because I have the kids now, I'm thinking of something different.

5. Missed opportunities and difficulties accessing support

Survivors highlighted several missed opportunities for accessing support earlier or more easily. **None of the interviewees reported having been referred to specialist domestic abuse support by the health system.** In instances where women had received care from their GP or hospital for domestic abuse related health issues, they reported not having been asked if they were suffering from abuse or given any information about how to get support, even when the survivor and the perpetrator were under the care of the same GP, who was aware of the perpetrator's mental health concerns.

I actually went to the hospital... And they didn't ask me any questions. They didn't offer me any advice or anything like that.

It's not something I've ever experienced in my life. And I had no idea I was experiencing it. I do now. I just thought my husband was just very mentally ill and I was looking for support to help him with that. But obviously, I realize now that he just wanted to blame everybody else and not take responsibility and not get help on quite a few occasions in the past. The GP said to him "When you want help, we will give you help". ***And I have been to the GP quite a few times, not coping with it... When does someone work out that it is abuse, I don't know.***

During lockdown, GP support with domestic abuse issues was particularly difficult to access as most appointments available were by telephone; women said they could not call the GP and speak about their concerns as they might have been overheard by the perpetrator.

You cannot talk on the phone when you're in abusive relationship. Most of the time because they're behind you all the time... So ***I didn't go to the doctors at all during lockdown, because if there was anything I want to talk about, I couldn't get on the phone because he could hear me.***

Other settings, such as places of work or job centres, were also identified as places where concerns about domestic abuse could have been raised by others.

I can't ever recall being ever asked outright "Have you been hit?". ***No one ever sort of said, "do you need help?".***

As noted previously in this report, women also tried to get support via their council, and it was felt that support from domestic abuse services could have been offered more proactively.

6. What could be done differently in future

Women suggested that increased awareness of domestic abuse would be beneficial to supporting others in similar circumstances and help prevent abuse. Women proposed that schools should provide more education to children and young people about what domestic abuse is, how to recognise it and how to get support. It was specifically said this should be for both girls and boys.

More information on the TV, social media or from GPs was also suggested as a way to increase visibility of the issue.

I think it just think it needs to be put out there, made more aware. I know they are doing it on telly now which is a good thing...because it makes people more aware of it and realise there is a pattern with it.

And I believe that ***Freedom programmes should be taught in schools, to boys and girls.*** So that it gives them an idea of life after school, relationships, so they know all the warning signs, and having things like that in schools and in anywhere, making people aware.

I think it's just making young people aware before they get into it...I think, like, bringing in the schools a bit more to talk about domestic abuse and domestic violence. ***Just show them the signs before they get into it, so they know when a sign comes, they know to just get out of it straight away before it gets worse.***

Through social media. I think people must get it and get it well, that is important to really educate yourself and develop your career and know the signs of an abusive person and stay away from them, because otherwise it's going to destroy you, destroy your life and destroy if you have kids, it destroys kids which is not worth it.... ***Social media, television, probably Facebook, you know, probably victims just sharing their stories with people.***

It was also suggested that additional training around the signs of abuse and how to support victims should be provided to people working in customer-facing roles, such as shop workers and council workers, as they could be the first people that victims turn to for help.

Anybody you call from the council. Everyone in the council. Everyone in the police. People who work in shops, because those are the first port of call... ***Everyone who works with the public need to know a Women's Aid, the police and what to do in emergencies, in domestic abuse and all that sort of thing,*** and especially everyone in the police and, especially everyone at the council. And it has to be made aware that ***anybody, from any walk of life, at any time, could face anything from anyone.***

Thinking about the services supporting women and their families, it was suggested that services should talk to each other more and share information about the family's support and updates to their circumstances. Women said that not all professionals working with them always had the latest information and they often had to keep bringing up their history; it was suggested that a statement of this could be shared with the relevant professionals to avoid this.

And I feel like, you know, ***police, social worker and the support worker here, they should come together because there's been times when my support worker, bless her, doesn't have a clue what the police have said.*** And then my social worker doesn't know what the police have said. So things need to be communicated between all these things all these...There's just no communication... ***More liaison with people in making sure that, you know, everyone's on the right page.***

Access to information about the legal process and courts system was also highlighted as an area that could be improved. Women said more information would be helpful as the legal system is confusing and domestic abuse services were unable to provide legal advice. Legal aid was also mentioned with respect to supporting victims with divorce proceedings, especially when they have had to go to refuge and start over with no financial means of their own.

It is also of note that one of the victims had to leave the jointly owned family home and pay for independent accommodation after having been locked out by the perpetrator.

In addition, women talked of difficulties in accessing legal help and going through the court process regarding child custody and visitation rights. Since lockdown, court appearances have been held via video conferencing. These were said to be difficult as women could see the perpetrator on the video call; this was not felt to be right, as in a physical court women do not have to see their perpetrator. It was suggested there should be an option to request telephone hearings instead.

That was by Zoom, which is difficult because you can see the person. ***I suppose the difference with going to court or telephone is that you don't actually have to physically look at them.***

Legal help, because it seems like everyone [at domestic abuse service] can help you and talk to you. ***But actually, legally, what can you do and what can't you do? It was kind of really unclear.***

Finally, one of the victims mentioned a wish to see perpetrators brought to justice, and expressed doubts about them experiencing any negative consequences as a result of their abusive behaviours.

The problem is, you know, what is being done to these men? Do they just get away with it, just because they can deny, they be like "Oh, I never did that, what she said is not true" and they go away like that.

7. Appreciation of support

When women were asked about why they had volunteered to speak with us, reasons given included that the interview was an opportunity to express their gratitude for the support they had received from different services. Women were very appreciative of the support they had received, particularly from the specialist domestic abuse services who acted as recruiters for this work. Women spoke of not knowing what they would have done without the support. Women found staff supportive and non-judgemental, and at the refuges they felt safe and cared for. One of the survivors expressed a wish for her incentive to participation to be donated to the organisation who had supported her as a way to express her gratitude. The interview was also an opportunity to tell their story, which they hoped would help other people in their situation.



8. Recommendations for the Surrey DA partnership and individual agencies

The experience reported by interviewees pointed to several actions that can be taken either at system level or by individual agencies and organisations. Some of these actions pertain specifically to situations of lockdown, while others are more general and relate to points of improvement agencies and organisations should action regardless of public health emergencies.

These actions are summarised in the image below; **they are categorised both according to the agency/organisation the action relates to and their specific relevance either to general circumstances (lighter colour and thinner border) or to possible future public health emergencies and lockdowns (darker colour and thicker border).**

Actions that do not pertain to a specific agency or organisation type span across the table, and are also distinguished in general/lockdown related through a lighter/darker colour.

It is possible to distinguish actions in ten broad categories:

- Engagement
- Education
- Awareness raising
- Tackling isolation
- DA training for staff
- DA training for businesses and places of work
- Expansion of existing offer
- Data quality and data sharing
- New DA digital solutions
- Addition of specialist DA staff to workforce

While this report represents an important step forward in understanding the experience of victims and survivors of DA during lockdown conditions, it is important to highlight once more that it is not fully representative of the experience of victims/survivors, in the absence of contributions from a few key categories. Further engagement work will likely develop a more nuanced understanding and further recommendations for all agencies and organisations.

Surrey Domestic Abuse Response System – recommendations for preparedness

Surrey County Council

1. **Train all staff to identify and respond appropriately DA**, with priority given to social and housing workers
2. Include **DA-specific support in the Early Help offer** to compensate for the impact of DA on children and young people

Surrey Police

1. Ensure **accurate records of existing restraining orders are available to all police stations** across Surrey

2. Train police officers to **understand how lockdown-related regulations might be exploited by perpetrators**

Health

1. **Train all staff to ask appropriate questions about DA**, with priority to patient-facing staff
2. consider adding **IDVAs in all Surrey hospitals**
3. include a **DA “flag” in self-service booking systems** so victims can let GPs know the health concern they want to discuss is DA-related

Outreach

1. **Consider digital solutions to offer videocalls** instead of phone calls where it is safe to do so

Refuges

1. **Expand support offer to include career advice** for guests who need to retrain/acquire economic independence
2. **Expand capacity to accommodate survivors with children**

Family Court / Justice system

1. **Consider the appropriateness of contact with children via phone/videocalls** as the perpetrator will gain access to the victim's home environment
2. **Train judges to consider the appropriateness of remote proceedings** and mitigating actions to support victims

Actions for all agencies/organisations

1. **Seek to engage with groups of survivors not represented in this report**, most notably with men, foreign nationals, people over the age of 60, people in homosexual relationships and survivors who were not in a romantic relationship with the perpetrator
2. Ensure that **professionals supporting a victim have access to shared** files including the most recent updates from all agencies

3. Promote the **inclusion of DA as a topic in the curriculum of Surrey schools, with particular reference to coercive control**
4. Continue to **raise awareness of DA through public campaigns with the use of traditional media as well as social media**, including details of how victims can seek support
5. **Consider demand, capacity and funding for refuges and children's outreach services** to enable survivors and their dependants to access support

6. **Tackle isolation, particularly for categories considered at increased risk of isolation** through the fostering of groups around common interests
7. **Achieve 100% DA training for old and new staff through shared learning** (e.g. through the Surrey Children's Academy). Higher priority should be given to training staff in customer facing roles
8. Actively encourage local organisations (e.g. places of work, voluntary organisations) to **train their staff to recognise domestic abuse**

9. **Train staff to consider any new lockdowns and a more restrictive lifestyle as catalysts of change in the context of domestic abuse situations**; while change is likely to determine a worsening of the victim's experience of abuse, it might also represent an opportunity for agencies to become involved, spot signs of abuse and offer support.

10. For any new lockdown, each agency should **ask specialist DA services to carefully consider the potential repercussions of individual restrictions and regulations on survivors, and train agency staff** to anticipate how perpetrators might potentially exploit them to their advantage