

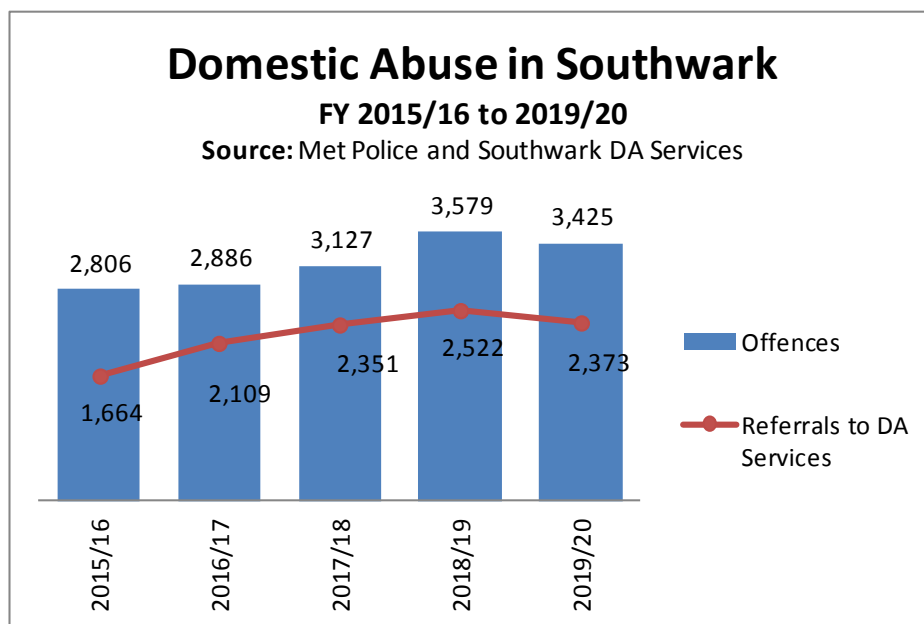
Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 10 September 2020	Meeting Name: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		<i>Impact of lock down / Covid 19 on Domestic Abuse and how this has affected children and young people.</i>	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Report author(s):		Lisa Negi, Community Safety Officer Sharon Ogden, Safer Communities Team Manager	

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Domestic abuse (DA) is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can include, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.
2. The council and its partners have recognised DA as a priority for many years and it is a fairer future commitment to tackle all forms of gender based violence. Tackling DA and its long term effects is also a shared priority for both the Southwark Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) and the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP).
3. A 5 year Domestic Abuse Strategy was launched in 2015 and Solace Women's Aid was commissioned to deliver Southwark's integrated Domestic and Sexual Abuse service. Building on the Domestic Abuse Strategy, July 2019 saw the launch of a new VAWG Strategy (2019-2024). This extended the partnership priorities to tackle all forms of gender based violence. These are:
 - Supporting victims
 - Tackling perpetrators
 - Prevention and early intervention
 - Partnership working
4. Southwark has one of the highest volumes of DA in London. In the 12 months from June 2019 to June 2020 there were 3348 domestic abuse offences recorded by the Police in Southwark, this compares to 3561 in the previous rolling 12 months, a reduction of 6%. However, it should be noted that a spike in reported cases has occurred since Covid 19 lockdown measures were implemented, with July 2020 seeing the highest monthly cases (321) since May 2019.
5. Demand for the Domestic Abuse service has increased year on year and now receives as many as 2500 referrals for survivor support per annum. In addition to the support and advice provided to survivors of abuse, the service also delivers a perpetrator behaviour change programme and delivers child therapeutic interventions to approximately 20 children per year.

6. Table 1 below shows the corresponding increase in recorded domestic abuse offences; 45% increase from 2013/14 to 2019/20 and referrals to the Southwark domestic abuse service; 43% increase from 2013/14 to 2019/20.

Table 1



7. In addition to the main service the Council also commissions Refuge to provide a 26 bed emergency domestic abuse refuge for 26 women and their children, and YUVA which works with young people who are displaying abusive behaviours in their personal relationships (parent/carer or girl/boyfriend).

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN/COVID 19 ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

8. The Covid 19 pandemic and the government imposed lockdown which commenced on 23rd March 2020 has had a significant impact on victims of domestic abuse and their children, this impact has been felt nationally and locally. Survivors and their children have had their access to support services reduced. With front door access and face to face delivery suspended due to lockdown, the way service users access services has changed and services have had to respond and adapt quickly to ensure service users retain effective access to support. There has been much greater use of virtual support methods such as online chat functions and contacts via social media.
9. When lockdown was first imposed there was an initial decrease in demand for domestic abuse services as a result of lockdown circumstances making it more difficult for victims to access support (at home with the perpetrator) and also reduction in referrals from professionals. However as the strict lockdown conditions eased we very quickly saw a dramatic increase in demand for services. MASH referrals also increased as well as domestic abuse related calls to services such as Childline, and domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police.

National Picture

10. Refuge reports experiencing record highs in demand for its National Domestic Abuse Service Helpline as Government lockdown restrictions have eased. The total number of calls to Refuge's Helpline increased by 77% during June. In addition, the first week in July saw a 54% rise in women needing refuge space when compared with the last week in June – the highest number of women needing emergency accommodation during the lockdown period.¹
11. NSPCC reported that contacts to their helpline about the impact of domestic abuse on children increased by 32% since the start of the lockdown, to an average of one an hour. In May 2020 the helpline received its highest number of contacts about domestic abuse since 2016 when the current recording method began².
12. A Report by Oxford and Manchester Universities suggests that child to parent violence has also significantly increased since lockdown measures were put in place. They found that the number of child to parent violent episodes increased by 70%, and that 69% of practitioners surveyed, said they had seen an increase in referrals for child to parent violence³.

Local Picture

13. Locally, Southwark Domestic Abuse Advocacy and Support Service delivered by Solace saw referrals for survivor support increase by 25% in the period from 1st April to 30th June compared to the same period in 2019. The number of referrals received from victims aged 16 to 25 also increased significantly (46%; 137 compared to 94 in the same period last year). July 2020 saw the highest number of referrals ever received by the service in a single month.
14. The increase in referrals was largely driven by a dramatic increase in high risk referrals. Between 01/04/2020 and 30/06/2020 204 high risk cases engaged with IDVAs compared to 95 for the same period the previous year, this is an increase of 115%. In line with this, there was a corresponding increase in referrals to MARAC. The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is coordinated by Southwark Council and meets fortnightly to provide a multi-agency response to high risk cases of domestic abuse. During the period 28th April 2020 to 18th August 2020, 312 cases were heard by Southwark MARAC, this compares to 232 in the same period last year, an increase of 34%.
15. Children's social care recorded a 34% increase in contacts relating to domestic abuse in the period 1st April 2020 – 31st July 2020 (781), when compared to the same period in 2019 (584). Whilst referrals for domestic abuse increased by 76%, from 151(April – July 2019) to 266 (April to July 2020).

¹ Refuge press release 23rd July 2020, https://www.refuge.org.uk/domestic-abuse-helpline-lockdown-eases/?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=SocialMedia&utm_campaign=PressNews

² NSPCC press release 10th June 2020, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2020/Calls-about-domestic-abuse-highest-on-record-following-lockdown-increase/>

³ Rachel Condry, Caroline Miles, Toni Brunton-Douglas & Anuoluwapo Oladapo, (Aug 2020), Oxford and Manchester University, <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-08-18-launch-report-child-parent-violence-during-pandemic>

16. There was an increase in individuals and families made homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse. Southwark's Housing Solutions service saw a 10% increase in approaches due to domestic abuse from 1st April to 30th June 2020 (112), when compared with the same period in 2019 (102).
17. The number of domestic abuse offences recorded by police in Southwark also increased during lockdown with July 2020 seeing the highest number of monthly cases (321) recorded since May 2019.

The Impact on Children and Young People

18. Children and young people in Southwark and across the UK, have had their lives turned upside down by the pandemic. Almost every young person has had to adjust to dramatic changes in their education and employment, routine and home life. The following key issues have been identified:
 - Deterioration of mental health
 - Increased exposure to abuse
 - Increase in child to parent violence
 - Uncertainty of child contact arrangements (with parents)
 - Impact of deterioration of parental mental health
19. ***Mental health*** - Young Minds (a young people's mental health charity) carried out a survey with 2,036 young people with a history of mental health needs between Friday 6th June and Monday 5th July⁴. This showed that:
 - 80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse (41% said that it had got much worse).
 - 87% of respondents agreed that they had felt lonely or isolated during the lockdown period
 - Among more than 1,000 respondents who were accessing mental health support in the three months leading up the crisis (including from the NHS, school and university counsellors, private providers, charities and helplines), 31% said they were no longer able to access support but still needed it.
20. ***Increased exposure to abuse*** - children's exposure to abuse has also increased due to lockdown. Met Police data shows that there has been a significant increase in domestic abuse incidents in Southwark (as elsewhere) and this, coupled with the fact that there would usually be significant periods of time when children would be outside the home; at school, with friends, or extended family, will have resulted in them being witness to a greater amount of abuse than during other times. The Women's Aid Report 'A Perfect Storm'⁵ published in August found that 53% of the women they surveyed said that their children had witnessed more abuse during lockdown and 37% stated that the perpetrator had increased the use of abuse that was directed towards their children. Coupled with the increased exposure, they would likely have felt that there was reduced opportunity for help and intervention during lockdown.

⁴ Young Minds Report 'Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with mental health needs' (Aug 2020), <https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/>

⁵ Women's Aid report 'A Perfect Storm' (Aug 2020), <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/a-perfect-storm-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-domestic-abuse-survivors-and-the-services-supporting-them/>

21. ***Increase in child to parent violence*** - in situations where the young person has been displaying abusive behaviours within the home, this has increased due to frustration and confinement. Parents have found it very difficult to home school with home schooling often being a trigger for abuse. The Oxford and Manchester University study suggests that there has been a 70% increase in child to parent abuse since lockdown was imposed. The Yuva service in Southwark has continued to support parents affected by child to parent abuse but this has been challenging to deliver effectively during lockdown as the young people have often been in the same space as the parent. Referrals for young perpetrators also reduced significantly throughout lockdown but have started to increase since July and is likely to increase further once young people return to school and try to adjust to the new routine.
22. ***Child contact arrangements*** - in situations where the child is living apart from the perpetrator, formal and informal child contact arrangements have often been more difficult. Supervised arrangements ceased at the start of lockdown and service users report child contact arrangements being used to further abuse and intimidate. Arrangements that were in the process of being settled by courts were also postponed, leaving victims and children in a precarious position. 38% of women surveyed by Women's Aid for their 'Perfect Storm' report, reported child contact arrangements being used to further abuse, with perpetrators pressurising women to facilitate child contact even when this would be in breach of restrictions, and also using the restrictions as an excuse not to return children. Service users report the uncertainty and increased tension around these issues has caused increased anxiety in their children, with one parent reporting it has resulted in the onset of night terrors and bedwetting.
23. ***Deterioration of parental mental health*** - the Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in many domestic abuse survivors experiencing deterioration in their mental health with the inevitable knock on effect on their children. If living away from the perpetrator then the isolation from support has often resulted in the triggering of old traumatic memories, anxieties and fears. If living with the perpetrator, victims have been more able to be controlled with less opportunity to seek help. A survivor survey conducted by Women's Aid in June 2020 found that 52% of women currently experiencing abuse experienced deteriorating mental health whilst 53% of those who had experienced abuse in the past said that the pandemic had triggered memories of abuse and affected their mental health. This deterioration in parental mental health will have a significant impact on the children in the household as they will often feel they are to blame, leading to increased anxiety and possibly depression.
24. The full impact, and particularly the long term effects of the covid 19 lockdown for those children and young people living in households where domestic abuse is present, will take some time to be seen. However, professionals working for specialist domestic abuse agencies have provided valuable insight in to the issues facing victims and their children during this time. One service user has also kindly agreed to share her experiences. Please see ***Appendix 1***.

Reduced access to support networks

25. The issues identified above have been exacerbated by the isolation resulting from lockdown, with access to formal and informal support networks severely reduced.
26. **Lack of access to formal support** - The isolation resulting from lockdown has had a dramatic impact on children experiencing domestic abuse. Any formal support they were receiving from professionals outside the home, whether at school or in other settings, stopped abruptly or took place via much less effective virtual means. Most specialist child therapy for children affected by domestic abuse takes place within the school setting and although our specialist agency, Solace, were able to continue some support via telephone and with the use of Zoom, this is much less effective as it doesn't allow the child a safe space and confidentiality away from the home.
27. School closures also meant that children no longer had access to face to face formal and informal support from dedicated school safeguarding leads and other school staff. Although virtual support has continued, this can be less effective than face to face support. Delivery of Operation Encompass was also impacted during this time. Operation Encompass is a partnership between the Metropolitan Police and schools. Whenever police officers attend a domestic abuse incident which takes place within a home where children are present (even if asleep at the time), the child's designated school safeguarding officer is informed so that 'silent' observation and support can be provided to the child within the school setting.
28. School staff play a vital role in supporting children affected by domestic abuse and the absence of that face to face support for this extended period will undoubtedly have had a significant impact on children's wellbeing. It is also likely to result in a significant upturn in safeguarding referrals once children return to school. Returning to former routines is likely to be a very challenging time for children and young people as well as their parents.
29. **Lack of access to social support networks** - In addition to the lack of access to formal support, children have also been cut off from the emotional support previously provided by friends and extended family. During the lockdown period, children and young people were confined to their own home and were not able to visit friends or family members or play/interact outside in groups. Extended family and friends homes may well have been a safe haven from the situation at home prior to lockdown.
30. **Lack of diversionary activities** - During lockdown, children and young people have had limited access to diversionary activities, such as youth clubs, playgrounds and other organised activities outside of school and home. Services have developed online activities and support but the physical isolation from peer groups would likely have increased their feelings of isolation and had a negative impact on their general health and wellbeing.

Covid service delivery adaptations

31. The Council recognised very quickly the need to adapt the delivery of services including domestic abuse services during lockdown, moving from face to face to delivery via online and remote means. This included the following:
- adaptation of our commissioned services to online delivery including survivor group work sessions taking place via Zoom
 - review of our website pages to ensure that more information was accessible online
 - communications campaign across Southwark to raise awareness of domestic abuse and how to seek help
 - additional funding provided for 2 additional full time Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) to support the increase in demand to the main service and also support Housing Solutions
 - additional funding to increase capacity for telephone advice line for main service.

In addition a number of new innovations have been developed including:

- New Who's in Charge parents support group (where child to parent abuse had been experienced) established via Zoom
- Police-led initiative whereby victims are provided with a code word to use in pharmacies and supermarkets to alert/report their abuse
- Safe spaces created via pharmacy consultation rooms to report abuse
- Weekly activity packs collated and delivered to children resident in the emergency domestic abuse refuge
- Bede, a charity which delivers both a domestic abuse project and a youth project, partnered with the singers and voice coaches at BBC Strictly Come Dancing/ The Voice to produce a remake of Britney Spears 'Stronger'. The recording and animated music video can be viewed on YouTube via the following link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBSmbVbtzyl&list=RDtBSmbVbtzyl&start_radio=1

NEXT STEPS

32. Domestic abuse services are now putting plans in place to transition back to a model of service delivery similar to that which operated prior to lockdown. Face to face contact with survivors and children will be resumed and the return to school for many children will present opportunities for increased access to formal and informal support, however, for some, the return to routine and structure will present significant challenges, particularly in households where child to parent abuse is an issue.
33. Demand for domestic abuse support services is likely to continue to increase in the coming months. Referrals to the Solace advocacy and support service in July and August suggest that Q3 will likely be the busiest quarter in the service's history. Likewise, safeguarding referrals related to domestic abuse will undoubtedly continue to rise placing increased pressure on both voluntary and statutory services.
34. The full impact of the covid 19 lockdown on children who are/have experienced

domestic abuse will be seen in the coming months/years but voluntary sector organisations are already calling on the government to mitigate the impact by ensuring that:

- Domestic abuse to be seen as a priority at the highest level across all sectors of government
- A long term funding solution should be established to meet the increases in demand and ensure sustainable high quality service provision
- Government to recognise the impact of domestic abuse on children and ensure that their welfare is taken into account when legislating around support for those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Ring-fenced funding for mental health in schools, colleges and universities to enable them to provide mental health support to all young people who need it.
- Support for the NHS to cope with a rise in demand for mental health support, enabling face-to-face support to resume widely where possible

Appendix 1

Case study - Tara

Tara, an 8-year-old girl, was referred to the child therapy service during the Covid19 pandemic after witnessing her mother being verbally, emotionally and physically abused by her father in the past. Tara is described as very shy and withdrawn and was receiving emotional 1:1 support at school. With the closure of schools at the beginning of lockdown she had not been able to access the provision, with a deterioration of her psychological and physical well-being.

Lucy, Tara's mother, was particularly concerned as Tara seemed to be depressed and anxious, refusing to eat and sleep. Mum was worried that she would start to self-harm. Mum reported that she did not know where to turn for advice and information on how to support her child's mental health during this time, feeling that her own mental health was being badly impacted as well. Mum felt that being isolated at home was triggering old traumatic memories, anxieties and fears. She felt that she could not cope with the demands of parenting, the uncertainties of the future (having underlying health issues herself and belonging to one of the ethnic groups which is at greatest risk from the virus) and the unforeseen financial difficulties that she was now facing.

Tara and Lucy were struggling with a sense of loss and fear, difficulties in coping with a lack of structure and routine, increased isolation and missing contact with family and friends.

Mum was also worried about how her daughter would transition back to 'normality' when lockdown was eased and the long term impact on her, balancing support for her child's home-learning with work from home in a small flat without an outdoor space. During lockdown mum experienced difficulties around child contact, with child contact arrangements being used to further abuse and intimidate. Mum was also concerned about her ex-partner not following all the safety measures for Covid19 and possibly withholding the child.

Solace's involvement with the family began when lockdown measures started to be eased down, after an incident that took place at a children's party that mum and Tara were attending, where Tara's dad showed up, attacking Lucy and trying to abduct Tara. He was stopped and arrested; a restraining order was subsequently issued to protect Lucy and her daughter.

Tara felt she was not safe anymore, she felt trapped and in constant danger. She stopped talking. She was displaying PTSD symptoms, having flashbacks and nightmares, being hypervigilant, showing a complete lack of interest in participating in regular activities, not wanting to see her friends or people in her family that she loves or socialise (safely), feeling guilty about what happened, being easily startled. She seemed depressed. At this point she was back in school for a few days a week and she was struggling to cope, having her friends in other 'bubbles' and not being allowed to play with them during the breaks.

During lockdown the Solace therapist provided weekly parenting and emotional support for mum, as Tara initially refused to have sessions online. Mum was provided with activities and resources that she could implement at home with Tara, helping her to create a routine. Mum reported that having weekly reviews with the therapist helped her to be consistent and gave her structure.

After further conversation with Lucy, Tara decided to start sessions online. As she was a first time contact it was initially more challenging to build a relationship online and to hold the sessions for the usual 50 minutes (due to the sustained attention that a screen requires).

Tara has recently started to show more confidence, less compliance and withdrawal, initiating activities and starting to explore past and recent traumatic events that have impacted her life.

She has been supported with stories, talking therapy, art tools, play therapy techniques (with toys that she has at home), to explore her feelings and anxieties.

Tara has recently shared that she feels much better after talking about what happened and she described having a 'blockage' in her heart that did not allow her to talk. She also shared her worries about telling her mum how she really feels, fearing that she would upset her. She is starting to express her sadness around school and not seeing her friends.

Tara has an incredible insight and she feels now that she can talk about her fears of how school will look like in September (when she might be separated from her friends again), how she worries about her mum catching the virus and not having a job, how disappointed she is in her dad. A safety plan has also been completed with her.

Lucy has reported that Tara is more open with her and seems more comfortable about sharing her feelings and thoughts. She seems generally happier and more settled. Therapeutic support for Tara is ongoing.