



PROTECT COVID 19: Exploring lived experiences of the impact of intimate partner violence and abuse on children, affected family members and perpetrators during the COVID- 19 global pandemic.

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Background

- In 2019, approximately 2.4 million (5.7%) adults aged 16-74 years in England and Wales experienced domestic violence. Of these, 4.2% experienced abuse carried out by a partner or ex-partner, referred to as intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA).
- The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has exacerbated IPVA and a surge in incidents has been reported through local police intelligence, voluntary and statutory agencies and calls to UK helplines.
- It has been reported that incidents of IPVA have increased as a result of household tensions due to enforced coexistence (multiple national lockdowns and working from home practices), economic stress related to loss of income, the disruption of social and protective networks and the decreased access to support services.
- This impact is felt most greatly within the home and may reverberate across family networks.

Project Aim

Our N8 PRP project aimed to understand how victims/survivors and perpetrators of parental IPVA experienced the adapted multi-agency response to IPVA during the pandemic

Methods

- The study was conducted October 2020- September 2021
- Semi-structured interviews via telephone and a focus group via Zoom
- North East of England
- Interviewed victims/survivors and perpetrators of IPVA
- Participants were recruited via the police, local authorities, women's refuges, and voluntary/third sector organisations
- 22 participants were interviewed for this project; of these, seventeen were women (nine white British; eight Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi) and five were men (all white British)
- Participants had between one and five children

Findings- General impact of lockdowns

- Every participant described the various ways the pandemic had impacted upon their lives
- Being forced to spend more time with their partners was described by perpetrators and victims alike as contributing to tension
- COVID amplified the existing aspects of abusive relationships through increased forms of control, surveillance, and isolation, therefore impacting on ability to access any support.
- *[Y]ou're isolated. Well, I think they survive on that, because that's what perpetrators do, they try and have you come away from your loved ones. So, it was kind of like a win-win situation. He always knew where I was, he always knew who I was talking to... So, it was like you're even more isolated and you're even more closed-off from means of support. (Participant 5; Survivor, 2 children).*

Impact on the children

- Impact on children was spoken about in two distinct ways, one being the direct exposure to instances of domestic violence and the other was the re-traumatisation that could occur if children overheard conversations between parents and professionals regarding such incidents.
- The likelihood of children overhearing was increasingly likely due to school closures throughout lockdown resulting in home schooling.
- *I'll not speak properly because I don't want them [the children] to hear any of my worries and concerns. I don't want that portrayed onto them, so I'll not talk properly. It is a bit awkward. (Participant 21, survivor, 2 children)*

Access to IPVA support

- Survivors reported receiving specialised support from various services and agencies during lockdown
- Interview participants highlighted the flexibility and adaptability of specialist IPVA programmes during Covid-19 as a key feature.
- *“I think maybe the online stuff can be good as well. So, if you've got somebody with a massive caseload who is really busy, at least it might give them an opportunity to check in with somebody every week on Zoom for 15 minutes when they couldn't have the time that week to go and visit them ”* (Participant 9; Survivor, 1 child)

Online support

- Participants spoke of barriers and added complications that occurred because of the transition to online and telephone support.
- The remote or online platforms could be seen as inhibiting the rapport building that would occur if support was taking place face to face.
- The lack of human interaction did have serious consequences for some survivors, and rather than providing help, online support groups could be a cause of emotional distress.
- *I found it really difficult because it's online, you know, they cannot read people's body language. One of the times I was online, I just cried the entire way through it, but nobody recognised that. I had- and that triggered all my nightmares, I had nightmares and that but nobody... whereas had I been in the class, that would have been spotted. (Participant 10, Survivor, 4 children)*

Victim/survivor contact with the police

- Several participants reported having contact with the police during lockdown. The reasons for victims/survivors to contact the police included reporting incidents and receiving ongoing support.
- Most of the contact with the police occurred through phone calls. Victims/survivors reported that they felt the police had a heightened awareness of the potential impact of lockdown on incidents of domestic violence and they responded sensitively.
- *I think they knew like, if he came to my house this time I couldn't really leave, because we're in lockdown... this time they actually searched my house and my garden, and they were doing walks around my street to make sure if he came, before they arrested him, that I was safe in my house... I think the way they handled it, I think it was more down to Covid, because I was locked in the house. The responding officers who came out first, they were a lot, like they cared more, and they were constantly reassuring us and ringing to make sure I was okay. (Participant 2, Survivor, 1 child)*

Perpetrators criminal justice interventions

- Three men had attended an offender management programme as an alternative to accepting a formal caution or being charged following their arrest for IPVA.
- Perpetrators tended to describe Checkpoint in positive terms, suggesting it was ‘useful’, ‘interesting’, and ‘helpful’.
- Two male respondents had attended a perpetrator behavioural change programme delivered by a Local Authority.
- The group sessions sometimes resulted in perpetrators feeling embarrassed, ashamed, and stigmatised
- *At first it was embarrassing, like shameful, you don't feel good about yourself being in that situation, you know what I mean, going into these situations because domestic abuse and things like that, it's not something to be proud of. (Participant 4; Perpetrator, 2 children).*

Policy/practice implications

The move to online and telephone support services had both negative and positive consequences. Organisations providing specialist support should consider the feasibility of delivering support and interventions using a mixture of face to face appointments to build rapport and remote measures once a relationship has been established to provide flexibility.

When organisations are providing support remotely, an agreed codeword should be established to alert professionals if the perpetrator or children are present, which will restrict the ability to converse openly.

Domestic Violence groupwork programs should be delivered face to face to optimise the impact of the content being delivered and to promote peer support for participants.

There is further need for frontline services to acknowledge that immigration status can be a barrier to accessing services and recognition of the importance of specialist culturally sensitive support (particularly the case with honour-based violence) inclusive of using independent translators rather than family members when assessing need.

Further education and awareness is needed regarding the DDV- Destitution Domestic Violence concession, which enables victims/survivors on a UK partner visa to claim public funds while applying to settle in the UK because of domestic violence.

Dissemination and Impact

Completed

- N8 Final report- N8 Policing Research Partnership
- National College of Policing

In progress:

- Fuse, The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health
- DAHLIA-19: Domestic Abuse and Covid-19 International Workshop (May, Lake District)
- Aiming for an article in Journal of Interpersonal Violence
- To present at strategic meetings across Durham Police force

- This project has led to other projects being funded and conversations taking place regarding further funding opportunities.

Research Team



The research team consisted of Dr Hayley Alderson, Dr Simon Barrett, Carrie Barron, Hilda Frost, Dr Simon Hackett, Professor Eileen Kaner, Dr Ruth McGovern, Ms Deborah Smart, Dr Will McGovern, Dr Michelle Addison, Dr Sam Burns, Ms Victoria Cooling, Ms Linda Whitehead, DCI Yvonne Dutson and Gillian Routledge.

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