

Seeking support for domestic abuse

Experiences of survivors during the Covid 19 pandemic

Women's Aid 2022

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Introduction

Domestic abuse is underpinned by coercive control, a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence. This manipulation, control and abuse often makes it nearly impossible for victim-survivors of domestic abuse to ask for and receive the physical, mental, economic, and legal support they need to deal with the abuse they've suffered. At Women's Aid we know that experiencing domestic abuse is incredibly isolating. Seeking and receiving the right support is vital for survival in many cases and reaching out to informal or formal support services can be an important first step.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began and restrictions and lockdown measures came into force in March 2020, Women's Aid ran an initial [Impact on Services Survey](#). Being acutely aware of the significant cuts to victim-survivor domestic violence services over the last 20 years, it was no surprise to find that the 45 local domestic abuse services across England surveyed had little or no financial resilience to meet the huge new challenges posed by the pandemic. As we know from the initial Women's Aid study into the [Impact of the Pandemic on Survivors](#), and as our report [A Perfect Storm](#) shows, many victim-survivors experienced extreme isolation during the lockdowns, and access to both informal and formal support services was significantly more difficult.

This briefing explores the experiences of victim-survivors trying to access support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our survey respondents were all female, from a range of age groups and parts of the country, and of the 283 survey respondents we had, 187 had accessed or attempted to access informal or formal support during the pandemic. The stories and experiences shared through our survey and this report help us to see and state what changes are needed to bring about an end to domestic abuse, specifically in relation to access and effectiveness of support for victim-survivors and police responses.

Findings

There are different types of support which victim-survivors may access; formal and informal. Women's Aid defines informal support as support from friends/family or community members in person or via social media/online networks; and formal support as support from a domestic abuse support service or other professional agency.

Recognising that there are a variety of support options, many of which can be used and utilised simultaneously, which widens the network of support available to victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

Findings from Women's Aid's three initial surveys into the impact of Covid-19 that Women's Aid carried out in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic indicate that:

1. whilst domestic abuse services in England were adapting to the government Covid-19 guidelines and were continuing to offer vital support to domestic abuse survivors, many were forced to reduce or withdraw the support that they are able to offer women and children – largely due to staff shortages and challenges in adapting to remote delivery ([Impact on Support Services](#)).
2. Covid-19 lockdown measures exposed survivors to worsening domestic abuse, whilst restricting their access to support. Prior to lockdown, fleeing abuse was already a challenging and tumultuous time for many survivors; lockdown measures made leaving an abusive situation harder than ever. Survivors faced substantial challenges accessing specialist domestic abuse services, mental health support and maintaining informal contact with friends and family ([Impact on Survivors](#)).
3. victim-survivors faced many challenges when accessing support due to lockdown restrictions. For some, the restrictions themselves caused significant barriers to support networks, such as reduced capacity of support services. For others the behaviour of the abuser stopped them from seeking help, for example by cutting victim-survivors off from their support network. The fear of catching Covid-19 prevented some from seeking support and alarmingly some felt that they would not be a priority for the service provider due to thinking others had probably experienced worse or needed the service more during the pandemic ([Perfect Storm](#)).

Covid-19 led swiftly to increased isolation for most people and changes and significant limitations to the provisions of many services across the country. This was challenging for many people but posed additional risks and a set of unique challenges for victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The findings from this one year on survey support the initial findings from Women's Aid research earlier in the pandemic. Overall, respondents reported that access to support was harder; Covid-19 and associated restrictions continued to lead to increased isolation and increased challenges accessing decreasing levels of support for victim-survivors. One respondent told us that; *"beside the fear of severe abuse during the escalated first period I was very scared of Covid-19 so ended up relying on him to do the shopping. As he was almost wholly stuck at home with me the whole*

time I was badly cut off from all help as I couldn't make phone calls to anyone or get back up. The fear in that made me very depressed as I felt scarily alone and very vulnerable."

"Isolation during the pandemic with no family support living close by has been devastating."

"The only thing I am allowed to do by myself is go to the beauty salon as this was closed it meant I never had any away time from him"

Seeking informal or formal support during the first year of pandemic

To better understand the impact of the first year of the pandemic and explore the issue of access to support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse we asked a series of questions starting with one which explored how many people accessed, or tried to access, support during this time.

Table 1: Which of these statements describe your experiences of seeking support for domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
I accessed or attempted to access either informal or formal support during the pandemic	66.1% (187)
I did not try to access any support around domestic abuse	11.3% (32)
Selected both answer	0.1% (2)
Blank	21.9% (62)

As shown in table 1, just under two thirds of respondents accessed or attempted to access support during the pandemic (187 out of 283).

For those that were successful in seeking support the impacts were primarily positive;

"It gave reassurance that I was being reasonable and not going mad"

"I was able to leave home, move into a refuge and get the help I required"

However, this was not the case for everyone;

"I'm too frightened to say much but it's made things worse. It was very distressing because I feel like I'm not going to get out of this now. It's making me question my memories of events and I have to look at my evidence to remind myself it's real. I feel like I'm being questioned and not believed or that people feel like because they don't like me, I don't deserve to be safe. I feel really frightened. I don't have anywhere to turn. Some of the support has been so good and some of the people really kind but they're too busy to help me. I know it's not their fault,

but it made me wish I hadn't asked for help at all because the false hope is killing me, and I feel really hopeless now."

"It was someone to talk to, but it didn't stop the abuse"

Of the minority of respondents who didn't access support, some explained why this was the case:

"I never think my experience is as bad as others"

"It's been hard in my area, not much support and long waiting lists"

"The police handled it badly, no urgency which extended the trauma, they did not act in 48 hrs, and it was passed to 4 detectives over 4 weeks before any attempt of an arrest was made. When I went to the police station to make the report, they made me stand in public to make my statement. Their contact with me was thoughtless and did not refer me for 8 weeks until I chased it when I was well enough. I had to wait for my abuser to return for them to make an arrest."

"My biggest concern is the second I walk out that door where do I go. I'm sure I'll not be allowed to take a phone or car, so I'll be stuck."

Impact of Covid-19 on support mechanisms

We asked the following question to better understand potential pandemic related barriers victim-survivors faced in terms of accessing support.

Table 2: How have your experiences of domestic abuse during the pandemic affected you?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
Made it hard to keep in touch with friends/ family / informal support	56.9% (161)
Damaged your relationships with friends/ family / informal support	45.9% (130)
Made it harder for you to leave	34.3% (97)
Made it harder for you to seek formal support (e.g. for the abuse, for mental health support, health services, sexual services)	45.2% (128)

From this data it is clear to see that for over half of our 283 respondents the pandemic significantly impacted their informal support structures by making it harder to stay in touch with family, friends, and other informal support channels. Almost half of our respondents reported that their informal support networks and relationships were actively damaged due to the pandemic therefore making this less of an option for support. Similarly, almost half responded that it was also harder to seek formal support during the pandemic.

"Made me feel like, what's the point... When people say at least with Covid you're safe as you're on your own, but it just led to more isolation"

"I had suicidal thoughts and didn't think I'd ever be able to leave my abuser under the circumstances"

The increased isolation that many of us felt as a result of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions had a devastating impact on many victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The value of supportive friends and family cannot be overestimated for those experiencing domestic abuse. However, with the lockdowns and criminalisation of many social norms many people, especially victim-survivors felt increasingly cut off from people who were, prior to Covid-19, keeping them afloat.

"I have considered ending my life to escape the stress anxiety and pressure. There is no way out and no way to protect my daughter"

Sadly, and perhaps not surprisingly, over a third of our respondents shared that the pandemic, with its restrictions, fear, and changes to services, schooling, employment practices and other impacts, had simply made it harder for them to leave.

Success in seeking support

At Women's Aid we know from years of working with victim-survivors that seeking support is a vital first step for many. Indeed, one of our survey respondents summed up the impact that accessing support successfully can have; "It saved my life". We wanted to explore this further to really understand how support can help and identify areas where more work needs to be done as we enter 'the new normal' and learn from the Covid-19 experience.

Table 3: Which of these statements describe your experiences of seeking support for domestic abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Response	% of 184 respondents (number)
I successfully accessed informal support (e.g. from friends/family or community members)	61.9% (114)
I successfully accessed formal support (e.g. from a domestic abuse support service or other charity/agency)	71.7% (132)
I attempted, unsuccessfully, to access informal support	11.4% (21)
I attempted, unsuccessfully, to access formal support	16.3% (30)

Respondents were asked to select all statements that were true for them. Table 3 shows that despite some of the challenges and barriers to support addressed in Table 2, well over half of respondents to this question were still able to successfully access informal and formal support services.

“Lifesaving.... I had therapeutic support, case work and signposting as well as play therapy for my child.”

“Twitter has been absolutely amazing and the community groups on there have literally saved my life”

“It made a huge difference. I would not be free and happy now if it was not for the wonderful support I have had from my friends, family and local domestic abuse service”

We also asked; *“If you successfully accessed support, what difference did this make for you?”* and it is clear from the responses that many victim-survivors benefited from accessing support.

“This provided some validation and allowed me to process my own thoughts and manage my responses more quickly than I would have without that support”

“It helped me with emotional support for myself and helped me understand that what was happening wasn’t my fault”

“They ring me every week. I can’t leave but they tell me I matter. I would not cope without them. I don’t speak to anyone else.”

Easier access to support

Table 5: Which of these, if any, made it easier for you to access support or allowed you to do so?

Response	% of 203 respondents (number)
Nothing	15.3% (31)
I was able to use technology to access support	45.8% (93)
Friend/family member suggested where to go for support	20.2% (41)
Community group/someone in my community suggested where to go for support	9.9% (20)
Statutory services (e.g. health professional) suggested where to go for support	23.2% (47)
Friend/family member reached out to offer support	36.9% (75)
Community group/someone in my community reached out to offer support	5.9% (12)
Statutory services (e.g. health professional) reached out to offer support	12.3% (25)
Government advice that it’s okay to leave or seek support	13.3% (27)
Publicity literature/campaign from government/NHS	3.4% (7)
Publicity from domestic abuse charity	18.2% (37)
An agency referred me to support	14.8% (30)

Again, respondents were encouraged to select all options that applied to their situation and fortunately for many there were still channels through which they were offered or could access support. This was the case despite the pandemic related restrictions and in

many cases increased levels of abuse that victim-survivors experienced (see Childrens Report and One Year On Report). Respondents shared how their experiences of multiple forms of support, particularly from family and friends, community networks, and publicity from domestic abuse charities, helped during lockdown:

"I now understand the cycle of abuse, I've been given support from family and friends and also a counsellor to help with coping with what happened."

"Women's aid information was incredibly helpful in letting me know I was allowed to leave even given the current restrictions and also in bringing my attention to their online chat service that I didn't know about before."

"I didn't want to take children to a refuge because of the pandemic and so through the local Facebook group I found someone that I could go and stay with. I was able to post anonymously and ask. Someone had us to stay for the first week, then we went to a B&B and then another woman had an empty house. All of these away from the city I live in. We were away for 6 weeks until he finally left the family home."

Many cited the use of online or chat functions as especially helpful when experiencing lockdown whilst living with the perpetrator.

"Online chats or legal advice would be helpful. It is difficult to make phone calls without being heard"

"Electronic access is so important - as it may be out of hours if you can sneak out for a drive or he goes out. This support is vital!"

"I actually found more support during lockdown. Telephone and online support has been so much easier to access than going to appointments."

Respondents also explained that in some cases their social worker, GP, or local police (although this was not the case for most, as explored in the later chapter on reporting abuse to the police) were able to support them through listening to their experiences and following up on referrals to specialist services.

"My social worker helped me realise that what was happening was abuse towards me."

"My GP triggered all support services. The GP and domestic violence charities are excellent."

"Police intervened and removed me from property, given the extent of violence"

Engagement and support from the police and the judicial system more broadly is addressed in subsequent sections of this report.

Challenges and barriers to accessing support

The initial Women’s Aid surveys into the immediate impact of Covid-19 indicated that barriers to support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse were increasing. Unfortunately, this survey shows very clearly that by this point, one year on from the start of the pandemic, accessing support had become difficult if not impossible for many victim-survivors, for a range of reasons.

Table 4: Which of these, if any, made it more difficult (or impossible) for you to access support?

Response	% of 203 respondents (number)*
Worried won't be believed	50.2% (102)
I thought others might need the support that is available more than me	42.4% (86)
Worried about impact on children	37.4% (76)
I wasn't able to stay with friends or family because of the pandemic	34.5% (70)
Fear of catching/spreading the virus	26.1% (53)
I was scared of being homeless during the pandemic	25.6% (52)
I thought there were fewer spaces in support services due to the pandemic	24.1% (49)
I wasn't sure if I was allowed to access support or leave	22.7% (46)
Previous poor response (yourself or someone you know)	18.2% (37)
Abuser prevented me from accessing support	16.3% (33)
Experiences or fear of racism(of 35 Black and minoritised respondents)	11.4% (4)*
Experiences or fear of sexism	6.4% (13)
Experiences or fear of other forms of discrimination (e.g. homophobia or ableism)	2.9% (6)
Nothing	6.9% (14)

*A sample of 35 Black and minoritised respondents used to contextualise experiences/fear of racism as a barrier and give a more meaningful percentage to show

this scale of this barrier. Whilst fear of racism towards the perpetrator creates a barrier to reporting for some white survivors, this was not a finding in this sample.

Respondents were encouraged to select all options that applied to their situation. It is clear to see that there were, and are, multiple factors at play when it comes to stopping people from accessing support they need. Some respondents shared further information about how they experienced these multiple barriers to accessing support, which often involved fear of the repercussions alongside a lack of support from formal support systems.

"Fear of retaliation from abuser. Stress of having to go through a legal process and not knowing how to go about that. Not knowing how emotional abuse is seen in law. "

"Fear of repercussions for the perpetrator at the time. Fear of how this could escalate his behaviour. Fear he would carry out threats. Fear I would not be able to communicate with him ever again. I can't but realise now this is for the best and he doesn't deserve to be communicated to."

Overwhelmingly, over half shared that they were worried they would not be believed, and for many the impact on their children was also a major concern.

"The abuser uses emotional abuse and controlling behaviours, this is never taken seriously by the police or anyone, even though I've spoken to doctors, my mental health workers about what my ex has done to me and they agree he has emotionally abused me, I feel there is nothing I can do about it and I'm stuck in the cycle of abuse because we have a child together."

"If no actual evidence it's my word against his. His job title also makes him look like a good guy. If I report then he knows I've talked about him and it could make things worse for me, he would react to this."

Some were fearful of Covid-19 itself, whilst others explained that experiencing the lockdowns with the perpetrator meant they had restricted access to support due to their constant presence.

"Main reason is I don't want to be homeless, especially during the pandemic. If you report to the police, that's what happens. Also don't want him to get seriously ill from Covid and know it's spreading a lot in prisons and police stations/cells. Also although I have proof of abuse, I can't prove any counter allegations from him aren't true. Also would make him more dangerous."

“Never having privacy in the house meant I couldn't get formal help.”

Survey respondents shared a range of experiences that showed why victim-survivors feel unable to report abuse or seek support as they are made to feel insecure, unsafe and like they always have to explain themselves. They also live in real fear of retribution.

Reporting abuse to the police

We know that domestic abuse is not reported to the police in line with the regularity and frequency of incidences and we also know that drastically few cases of reported domestic abuse result in the prosecution of the perpetrator. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2019 report into the police response to domestic abuse (HMICFRS, 2019) considered the responses the police service provides to victims of domestic abuse across the UK. Women's Aid, having reviewed the report, explained that it was *“worrying to see the continuing trend of one third of domestic abuse cases being discontinued due to the victim not supporting the prosecution”* and stated that clearly *“there is still work to be done to keep survivors and their children safe and hold perpetrators to account.”*

Unfortunately, one year on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the related lockdowns and restrictions, it is clear that for many these pre-pandemic trends have continued, if not worsened. The HMICFRS released a new report focusing on policing of domestic abuse during the first year of the pandemic (HMICFRS, 2021). The report *“acknowledged that the pandemic has put domestic abuse survivors at greater risk”* (Women's Aid, 2021).

There were some positive developments cited in the report such as the police making good use of technology and working with partners to find new ways to support survivors during unprecedented and unpredictable times. However, the report also stated that while the police had innovated throughout the pandemic, there are still serious concerns about long-term understanding of and approaches to domestic abuse.

We asked our respondents a series of questions related to their ability to report domestic abuse to the police and their experiences of doing so, in order to better understand the situation and further develop positives and recommend changes where required.

Table 6: Have you reported an incident of domestic abuse to the police during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
Yes	43.8% (124)
No	31.4% (89)
Blank	24.7% (70)

Table 5 tells us that to start with, less than half of the victim-survivors we surveyed actually reported domestic abuse to the police. These figures, whilst saddening, are not surprising when you consider both the context- many victim-survivors were experiencing the Covid-19 lockdown with/in the same environment as the perpetrators of their abuse- and a society that perpetuates [harmful myths about domestic abuse](#) that encourage and allow for victim-blaming and the assumption that people are lying about their experiences of abuse.

“My ex uses emotional abuse and controlling behaviours, this is never taken seriously by the police or anyone”

“I have no evidence of his abuse. I loved him, even for a long time after I left, and I didn't want to get him into trouble. I just wanted to escape. I was afraid, and still am, that it would be my word against his. He knows lots of the local police too, and I don't think I would be believed. He was very charming in public and involved in the local community, without evidence I don't see how the police could do anything. But I worry about his next partner.”

“My ex-husband made me believe that everything is my fault and that I am paranoid and making everything up. For these reasons I would never feel able to report what happened to me.”

We wanted to understand more about the experiences of those that were able to report domestic abuse to the police during the pandemic. Therefore, we asked the following question:

Table 7: What was your experience of reporting to the police?

Response	% of 124 respondents (number)
Negative	32.3% (40)
Neutral/ Not sure	26.6% (33)
Positive	40.3% (50)
Did not answer	0.8% (1)

Of the 124 respondents who did report domestic abuse during the pandemic, fewer than half had a positive experience; over half had either a neutral or negative experience.

For those that were supported by the police they shared a number of examples of how they were treated.

"I had a very positive result from reporting abuse where my abuser was charged with two assaults and eventually pleaded guilty in court to both charges."

"My local police station officers saved my life. They were professional and supportive. If it hadn't been for one officer in particular, I'd either still be in the situation or I'd be dead."

"They were very professional and followed through with the arrest and a caution afterwards when further abuse came from him and family members. They also followed up afterwards when he was due to appear in court".

Even for those with positive experiences Covid-19 has had a negative knock-on impact on their situation:

"I have had a wonderfully positive experience, mostly, but due to Covid everything has been slowed down so I am still waiting on a charging decision despite a thorough investigation and hours and hours spent with the police giving statements and evidence."

The many victim-survivors who had neutral or negative experiences also shared their stories.

"I was believed by the police on the night of the fire, but when the restraining order was broken by my abuser I was told there was nothing they could do because he didn't directly threaten my life"

"Once I had left, my experience with the police was more negative than the response from the male and female officers who helped me to leave."

"Lack of support from police, they don't understand domestic abuse and they need to understand it more to help. So I now continue to live with the perpetrator as nothing can be done."

"Lack of basic training or understanding by police services. They minimised and undermined my situation, effectively telling me that my abuser hadn't committed a crime"

"The police don't take it seriously."

"I was told in response that if I was afraid, I should leave the children with my husband and only go to the house to cook and wash for them. I won't seek their help again."

"It was a total disaster and caused me more harm. They completely character assassinated me and branded me mentally ill. They told me the rape wasn't rape because I shouldn't have let him touch me, I begged him to stop and he didn't. They specifically attacked me for hiding an escape fund and borrowing legal fees from friends. They used my taking him to court financially against me. They have totally and utterly portrayed me as a liar. They cherry picked evidence. They failed to comply with procedures especially not referring to CPS for early advice. They made judgements on my mental health when not qualified to do so. They refused to speak to witnesses. The whole thing has been appalling. They made me deal with single male officers on my own ignoring my requests for my Independent Sexual Violence Advisor to be there. They have utterly destroyed me."

"The male officer who took my statement had very little understanding of domestic abuse. He dismissed a lot of what I was saying and gave his own theories of what was happening in my 16-year marriage. [Service] helped me make a complaint as this was unacceptable. The two weeks following the arrest of my husband were very difficult as it was impossible to get updates from the police on when my husband would be told that his bail conditions would be lifted. This left me fearful he could come back to the house at anytime. He came back, very angry, within five minutes for being informed that his conditions had been lifted. At one point I asked if I could speak to the domestic abuse unit, I was told no. Given this experience I probably wouldn't ever involve the police again."

Where victim-survivors had positive experiences, this is the police doing what they are supposed to do in relation to domestic abuse. However, the range and brutality of the negative experiences show that major changes are needed to far better support victim-survivors of domestic abuse in reporting and prosecuting the crimes against them.

Finally, we wanted to better understand what, if anything, was dissuading people from reporting domestic abuse to the police in the first place. The experiences above go some way to explain why many victim-survivors no longer feel they can go to or rely on the police. This survey will help inform any recommendations that Women’s Aid can make but also support the police to change their practices or perception of practices where required.

Table 8: Did anything discourage you from reporting to the police?

Response	% of 206 respondents
Nothing	15.5% (32)
Previous poor response (yourself or someone you know)	30.6% (63)
Worried won't be believed	52.9% (109)
Wasn't sure if what happened to me is a crime	39.3% (81)
Experiences or fear of racism	5.3% (11)
Fear of police racism towards perpetrator	2.9% (6)
Experiences or fear of sexism	6.3% (13)
Experiences or fear of other forms of discrimination (e.g. homophobia or ableism)	4.4% (9)
Fear of having to speak about it to an officer of a specific gender (e.g. male or female)	16.0% (33)
Worried about impact on children	36.4% (75)
Unable to contact police whilst in lockdown with perpetrator	9.2% (19)
Fear of catching/spreading the virus	9.7% (20)

Respondents were encouraged to select all statements that are true for you, whether or not they did make a report during Covid-19.

Some respondents shared that they were discouraged from reporting due to fear of the police: "Fear of police, having been physically abused by them and then maliciously lied about in a *previous police report*".

Significantly, fear of retribution from the perpetrator also was given as a reason for not reporting the abuse:

"I only contacted the police after I left the home, I was fearful of repercussions before. My mother persuaded me and sat with me."

"Had been threatened that me and my family would be killed and cut up if I did"

"If I report and the police interview him but don't have enough evidence to press charges, he'll know he got away with it. That leaves him free to tell everyone I'm mad, made it all up etc and he'll know that he can do whatever he wants and still get away with it. It would make him even more dangerous."

"Was threatened and blackmailed if I said I was going to phone the police"

"Mainly fear of retaliation from abuser. Also stress of having to go through a legal process and not knowing how to go about that. Not knowing how emotional abuse is seen in law."

It is overwhelmingly clear that the main barrier was the fear that they, the victim-survivor, would not be believed.

"I'm afraid the police won't believe me"

"Fear of not being believed due to the people causing the abuse are of high social status"

"They seem to believe him, despite recorded arguments, they didn't even want to listen, all the officer was interested in was getting off work early that afternoon!"

Similarly, many responded that they weren't sure if what they were experiencing was a crime, indicating more education around what constitutes abuse is required for the general public as well as the police.

"Coercive control and emotional abuse not taken serious enough not bad enough to involve police"

"I keep thinking that I should be able to look after myself without having to burden the authorities."

"I didn't know common assault also included being shouted at / intimidated etc. I wish I had known I would have called the police so many more times."

I still feel I'm making lies about him and it's actually me all in my head"

Finally, there was a large proportion who were worried about the impact on children if they went to the police.

"I haven't reported other incidents either because I didn't want to upset the children ("please don't have him arrested"),"

"For some reason I don't want the kids, the school, everyone to know he is a bad man. I feel it's my fault. I've let it happen"

All of these experiences show clearly how difficult even contemplating reporting domestic abuse and accessing support can be for victim-survivors, and how much more needs to be done to support victim-survivors in being able to report domestic abuse and get the support they are entitled to.

Conclusion

At Women's Aid we know that experiencing domestic abuse is incredibly isolating. Seeking and receiving the right support is vital for survival in many cases and reaching out to informal or formal support services can be an important first step.

[A Perfect Storm](#) showed that only a short time into the Covid-19 pandemic, victim-survivors were having negative experiences of reporting domestic abuse to the police. The combination of poor police response, experiencing lockdown in the same environment as the perpetrator, and having limited access to informal and formal support due to Covid-19 restrictions left many victim-survivors in perilous situations.

The changes to and lack of informal and formal support due to Covid-19 restrictions coming in after years of cuts to services has been devastating for many victim-survivors. As we move beyond Covid-19, Women's Aid will continue to support victims-survivors of abuse, aim to provide networks and support to these people, and continue to push for improvements at a national level.

At Women's Aid we know the issues of failing domestic abuse victim-survivors by the police and the criminal justice system predates Covid-19 significantly, and it is something we are constantly working to change. As we move out of pandemic related restrictions and work towards "living with Covid-19" we must ensure that we learn from the mistakes of the past and make considerable and meaningful changes to how domestic abuse is policed, how reports are processed, and fundamentally how victim-survivors are treated, including learning specifically from what happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unless this happens, domestic abuse will remain underreported, under prosecuted, and more women and children risk harm at the hands of abusers.

Women's Aid will work to ensure support for all victim-survivors of abuse, rebuilding vital support networks and deconstructing the barriers and isolation that the Covid-19 restrictions built up. Also, we will call for greater action in the area of policing reform and improved prosecution processes as a priority for the government and police and courts across the country.

References and links:

For more information on the questions asked in our survey and the demographics of our survey respondents please see overall One Year On report.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), 2019, The police response to domestic abuse,

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/the-police-response-to-domestic-abuse-an-update-report/>

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