

One year of the Covid-19 pandemic Experiences of survivors during the Covid 19 pandemic

Women's Aid 2022

Introduction	2
Types of abuse	4
Physical abuse during Covid-19	6
Emotional/psychological abuse during Covid-19	7
Stalking/harassment abuse during Covid-19	8
Mental health, domestic abuse and Covid-19.....	9
Inequality, domestic abuse and Covid-19.....	12
What do you wish people understood better about domestic abuse?.....	15
References and links:.....	18
Appendix - Demographics.....	20

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on all areas of our lives. Women’s Aid has been working with victims-survivors of domestic abuse since 1974 and throughout the ongoing pandemic and its aftermath. We have seen that for many people, the pandemic has worsened their experiences of domestic abuse and created new opportunities for perpetrators to exert their abuse in different and heightened ways.

As an immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions, and law changes, we launched three surveys through which we spoke with victims-survivors of domestic abuse as well as service providers to understand and better highlight the impact of the lockdowns on both their experiences of abuse and changes to access to support as a result of the pandemic.

After over a year of lockdowns, tiering, changes to rules and laws as a direct result of the pandemic, we spoke again with victims-survivors to see if and how things had changed. We know it is essential that we share the stories of women and children impacted by domestic abuse, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, as this will further highlight where things need to change to ensure an end to domestic abuse against women and children, in line with Women’s Aid mission.

Unfortunately, in line with the trends Women’s Aid identified in earlier research, 100% of the 283 respondents to this survey, one year on from the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, expressed that they had experienced violence and abuse during the

pandemic, with 118 of our 283 respondents experiencing abuse specifically at the time that they completed this survey.

Methodology

This report presents findings from the second phase of a Women's Aid research project exploring the impact of Covid-19 on the experiences of domestic abuse for adult and child survivors and the specialist domestic services supporting them. The survey and analysis build on the studies and results published throughout 2020, primarily in [A Perfect Storm](#). The concerns, experiences, and eye-witness accounts provided by victim-survivors in this survey reflect what they were experiencing at that time. It is worth noting that this survey and report cannot therefore take into account any developments after (insert date of survey closure). That being said, through our ongoing work with victim-survivors, campaigners, domestic abuse and specialist support services, Women's Aid is able to share and reflect on these findings and make informed and relevant recommendations to the Government and other key stakeholders in order to improve the lives of victim-survivors and put an end to domestic violence.

To help us develop a fuller picture of the impact of Covid-19 we have separated out the results of this research into five reports. Alongside this "One year of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on victim-survivors of domestic abuse" report, we have addressed four thematic areas in specific briefings:

- Children, domestic abuse, and Covid-19
- Economic abuse and Covid-19
- Technology, domestic abuse, and Covid-19
- Seeking support during Covid-19

Each report focuses on how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon domestic abuse and victim-survivors in specific ways. Taken together, they further demonstrate the breadth and interconnectedness of the issue of domestic abuse and the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the five reports we uncover the impact of one year of the Covid-19 pandemic on victims-survivors of domestic abuse. We consider the significant and negative impact on mental health, as well as the use of technology in abuse, the interplay between economic resources and abuse, and the abuse experienced by children. Our research looks at both the rates and the extent of the abuse perpetrated and the impact it has had. It considers how Covid-19 and its associated restrictions has affected the ability of victim-survivors to seek and access support and given perpetrators new tools to carry out abuse

The findings from this survey are used to inform all of our work on behalf of women and children experiencing domestic abuse and the lifesaving local services which support them.

Who responded to the survey?

In this survey we wanted to hear from victim-survivors and understand their current and previous experiences of domestic abuse. As with the previous survey, survivors were free to interpret questions about their experiences in the way they most identified with. We asked our respondents some questions about their identity and demographics and a full breakdown of this information is provided in the appendix. In total 283 women responded, all aged between 16 and 70 years old. Almost 34% of survivors declared a disability, long term health condition or both. The vast majority, 274 respondents, live in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland). Unfortunately, as with our previous Covid-19 Impact Survey, the majority of respondents were white, and thus the experiences of black and minoritised women are under-represented in this sample.

Findings

Types of abuse

Through this survey Women's Aid sought to understand how the pandemic affected abuse. To achieve this, we asked a series of questions that focused on domestic abuse throughout the year since March 2020.

We asked; "Did the following types of abuse start or escalate during the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. since March 2020)?", and focused on six key areas, namely:

- Economic Abuse (See Economic Report for details)
- Tech Abuse (See Tech Report for details)
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional/Psychological Abuse
- Stalking/Harassment

For the purposes of this analysis we have counted "not sure" and "stayed the same" as experiencing the type of abuse in question. Due to a lack of knowledge and understanding around all elements of domestic abuse, the psychological impact it has, in-built stigmas towards experiencing abuse or being a victim-survivor, and society's

general approach to and understanding of abuse it is highly likely that those providing the responses “not sure” and “stayed the same” are experiencing this abuse but haven’t identified it as such.

“I didn't realise it was happening until after he had gone, people need to know more about abuse. He had basically brainwashed me, through control and pushed friends away and nearly my family. He continually put me down so my confidence was very low, and I felt I was going crazy.”

Where participants answered “no, it reduced” when asked if they were experiencing particular types of abuse, we have included this in our overall numbers of those experiencing domestic abuse, as the answer does not imply this abuse has stopped.

Sexual abuse during Covid-19

Table 1: Did Sexual Abuse start or escalate during the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. since March 2020)?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
No, it reduced	9.9% (28)
No, I've never experienced this	28.6% (81)
Not sure	3.2% (9)
Stayed the same	20.1% (57)
Yes, it escalated	7.8% (22)
Yes, it started	7.4% (21)
Not answered	23.0% (65)

In Table 1 it is clear that, whilst just under a quarter of respondents did not answer this question, the Covid-19 pandemic provided cover for many perpetrators to carry out more or continued sexual abuse. In total 137 (48.8%) respondents have experienced sexual abuse, with 21 respondents sharing that sexual abuse started during the pandemic and 22 stating that sexual abuse escalated in the same year.

“I felt as his wife, if I had sex with him more, he wouldn't have treated me that [abusive] way. In the relationship sex was his right, as my husband”

“All I know is I was treated like a piece of meat. Used for sex whenever he wanted, most days and was told I was his property so he could do what he wanted to me. I felt worthless and powerless.”

“By the end I was only allowed to do things for him or that he wanted doing and since I’m a woman he said I had to give him sex and what he wanted, even if I didn’t want to do it he would force himself on me and say no one would believe me because I’m younger than him and a woman.”

Physical abuse during Covid-19

Table 2: Did Physical Abuse start or escalate during the Covid-19 pandemic (I.e. since March 2020)?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
No, it reduced	9.9% (28)
No, I've never experienced this	21.2% (60)
Not sure	3.5% (10)
Stayed the same	14.8% (42)
Yes, it escalated	21.2% (60)
Yes, it started	7.1% (20)
Not answered	22.3% (63)

Again Table 2 shows that just under a quarter of respondents did not answer this question, however we can still clearly see that perpetrators were able to carry out, and significantly escalate, physical abuse during the first year of the pandemic. 160 (56.5%) respondents have experienced physical abuse during this time. For 20 respondents this abuse started during the pandemic and 60 respondents - over one fifth - experienced an escalation of physical abuse in the same year.

“Bruising does not show up as well on darker skin so I sent police photos of bruising from strangulation from my abuser which could be seen on my phone faintly.”

"I wish people just knew how manipulative abusers are. My ex is a professional with a highly paid job, he is charming and endearing to other people. Behind closed doors he would cry and use his childhood as his reasons as to why he was like he was. He would promise he would go to counselling and anger management after episodes of rage/physical abuse. He could seem so loving, likeable and helpful at times, but he would also scare me with his unpredictability and impulsive nature."

One respondent explained they suffered "severe mental and physical trauma" during the first year of the pandemic as a result of experiencing domestic abuse during this time.

Emotional/psychological abuse during Covid-19

Table 3: Did Emotional/Psychological Abuse start or escalate during the Covid-19 pandemic (I.e. since March 2020)?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
No, it reduced	2.5% (7)
No, I've never experienced this	0.7% (2)
Stayed the same	13.1% (37)
Yes, it escalated	68.2% (193)
Yes, it started	5.7% (16)
Not answered	9.9% (28)

Table 3 shows, in no uncertain terms, that throughout the pandemic emotional and psychological abuse of victim-survivors increased sharply with 89.4% (253) of respondents, telling us that they experienced this abuse in the first year of the pandemic. 16 respondents stated that this abuse started at this time and it is also clear that the Covid-19 pandemic provided abusers with more opportunities to exact emotional and psychological abuse, 193 respondents shared that they experienced an increase in this abuse.

"Made it harder to practice self-care, because he was at home so much more and was not supportive of me looking after myself."

"Emotional abuse gradually erodes who you are, the wounds can be deep and can take a long time to heal."

“It is not just physical. It is so much more. The emotional, mental, psychological abuse is longer lasting than bruises will ever be. You are keeping your head above water and praying that someone will listen, for the sake of your kids and your sanity, before something serious happens & you do not want to live the rest of your life in fear.”

Stalking/harassment abuse during Covid-19

Table 4: Did Stalking/harassment start or escalate during the Covid-19 pandemic (I.e. since March 2020)?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
No, it reduced	3.2% (9)
No, I've never experienced this	20.5% (58)
Not sure	4.6% (13)
Stayed the same	13.1% (37)
Yes, it escalated	32.9% (93)
Yes, it started	7.1% (20)
Not answered	18.7% (53)

Table 4 again shows that almost a fifth of respondents did not answer this question. 172 (60.8%) respondents have experienced stalking and harassment. 20 respondents shared that this started during the pandemic, and for 93 respondents, over a quarter, stalking and harassment increased.

“When being stalked, I was told to change my behaviour, whereas he received no reprimand for his abuse of me. I was told to keep curtains closed, wear a body cam, come off social media including dating sites.”

“The constant stalking, questioning, accusations - making it difficult to see friends and punishing you for doing things without them. You change your behaviour so as not to trigger abuse from them. Barrage of texts and voicemails if you dare to go out. The turning up at the home of the friend you are at, to check up on you and shout at you. Abuse is more than hitting. It's also damaging mentally.”

All of these women's devastating and traumatising experiences highlight that domestic abuse is “not just physical” and “it does not discriminate”.

Tables 1 to 4 provide evidence to support the case that throughout the pandemic perpetrators were more freely able to practice coercive control, a pattern of behaviour that underpins domestic abuse (see Seeking Support Report for more details), further enabling them to carry out different types of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse *towards victim-survivors*.

"It isn't just about being beaten. The coercive and controlling, and gaslighting side of the emotional abuse is horrendous to endure. I hope that people realise this is just as serious and dangerous and I hope people understand exactly what this is. I wouldn't wish my experience on anyone."

As one respondent told us, under non-pandemic circumstances many victim-survivors are not able to escape abuse; *"It isn't easy to leave because that person destroys your version of reality and sense of self therefore trapping you completely until you build up enough evidence and courage to see they are wrong."*

But for some, the Covid-19 pandemic and the isolation that restrictions brought with it, made leaving nearly impossible.

"I was just ready to leave him when the lockdown came."

"[The pandemic] made it harder to sort practical issues"

"I had to make myself homeless to flee."

"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"

Mental health, domestic abuse and Covid-19

In December 2021 Women's Aid launched a series of reports into domestic abuse and mental health (Women's Aid, 2021). We know, from years of working with victim-survivors, that all forms of abuse have negative and often long-lasting impacts on mental health. We also already know that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health and wellbeing of many people across the UK (Mind, 2021). Without acknowledging this additional impact of the pandemic there is a risk that we sleepwalk into a nationwide mental health crisis (The Guardian, 2021, 2022) due to children and adults alike experiencing excessive anxiety, isolation, fear, and stress. All of this is true, before we even consider the impact of domestic abuse on victim-survivors' mental health, during the pandemic.

At Women’s Aid we wanted to further understand the impact on people’s mental health of experiencing abuse during the pandemic, in order to better support, advocate for, and provide services for victim-survivors. We asked;

Table 5: Please describe how the pandemic affected your experiences of abuse including whether (and how) this changed throughout the year since March 2020?

Response	% of 283 (total) respondents (number)
Impacted your mental health*	75.6% (214)
Made you question yourself	65.4% (185)

*This question came after a range of questions covering economic abuse and difficulties seeking and access support during the pandemic. These elements are discussed at length in the Economics and Seeking Support Reports. With this in mind and given the context of the questions and the responses received (see below for more detail) we can see that the majority of the 214 who responded to this question understood it to mean negatively impacted on their mental health, as their examples show.

For a small minority the lockdown enabled some to move away from the abuse and seek support and start recovering; *“Started trauma therapy...had to move to a new house and also change my name.”*

However, for the vast majority of respondents the pandemic and the abuse they experienced during it significantly impacted respondent’s mental health. A number of respondents told us they developed “self-esteem issues, sleeping issues, ruminating” and many victim-survivors shared a picture summed up by this short statement; “my mental health issues have gotten worse”.

To understand the issue further we asked respondents to tell us more about how the first year of the pandemic and the abuse they experienced during this time, affected their mental health. Victim-survivors experiences were many and varied;

“3 months into lockdown I asked him to leave. I had started to self-harm whilst he was verbally abusing me. Anxiety kicked in when I ended the relationship, while the abusive texts were coming, and I shook when people came near me or my mother left mine. I’ve managed to have calm in my life since and Facebook pages have helped through sleepless nights and learning about narcissism. Now as it’s announced that the lockdown is easing, I’m starting to question and feel anxious if I want life to return to normal as I’m not sure what that is anymore. Each week for the last year I’ve been feeling a change as I go back to the old me,

but this has been in a safe environment with little exposure to others. On one hand I want the old confident and outgoing me back who felt safe, but do I feel safe anymore? There was no physical abuse but the mental abuse leaves scars, you question how you live your life, your whole life, how you interact with people. I was a very trusting person and now question if I can trust anyone. I'm annoyed he has made me have these constant thoughts."

"Before I left, I attributed much of my deteriorating mental health to the stress of working front line during the pandemic, but it wasn't because of that, it was because of the abuse I was experiencing at home. When I got signed off work things got so much worse for me. Work was a safe place, home was not."

Many respondents expressed their fear, stress, exhaustion, panic attacks, sleep issues, and PTSD worsened as a result of experiencing domestic abuse and the Covid-19 pandemic. Suicide was contemplated by 18 respondents.

"I have suicidal thoughts on most days. I feel extremely anxious and have difficulty sleeping. I don't feel my anti-depressants help anymore but it's so hard to get a GP appointment. When I had my annual medication review in regard to my antidepressant medication, I was asked by the nurse about my suicide risk etc. But this was on the phone and I don't have any privacy to talk. I desperately wanted to tell her how I feel so much worse and I can recognise the signs that my mental health has deteriorated. But I had no privacy, and he could hear every word I had to say."

"My mental health was initially very negatively impacted, with 3 suicide attempts in the last year."

19 respondents explicitly explained that pandemic and abuse related isolation had a severe impact on their mental health.

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

"My ex-husband had already socially isolated me and left me with no confidence. The pandemic intensified this. I feel strongly that I don't have a mental health problem, he is the one with the issue, but trying to get across to people that it's not me, it's the trauma that comes from psychological and economic abuse that is adversely affecting me has been difficult. It's been really hard to get targeted support during the pandemic and my ex-husband's legacy in my life that has led to a lack of confidence and financial vulnerability has been intensified."

“Although I have received amazing support through various channels, my mental health has gradually declined. Without being able to see friends and family I’ve felt very isolated and almost like a “sitting duck” just waiting for the next line of abuse to strike.”

42 respondents shared their experience of increased / worsened anxiety and depression.

“Throughout the pandemic I have experienced an increase in anxiety, which had previously been under control. I had a significant relapse in December and started medication again, having not needed any for about 3 years. I have also felt a lot more isolated.”

“Now I suffer with anxiety, depression & PTSD for which I’m now receiving help. I believe the pandemic has contributed to the severity of these symptoms.”

“This is the worst time of my life including the fallout from the abuse. Severe depression, anxiety, financial, legal and housing problems.”

“Anxiety and depression worsened. More isolated from friends and family. Spent more time with [my] abuser.”

These results paint a bleak picture for victim-survivor’s mental health, but unfortunately follow the trends that were developing in the first round of research by Women’s Aid, as published in A Perfect Storm. Women’s Aid will use this evidence to better support and advocate for improved services for victim-survivors.

Inequality, domestic abuse and Covid-19

At Women’s Aid we are striving to understand more and better how sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination affected victim-survivors’ experiences. We acknowledge that as an organisation we must do more to reach out to Black and minoritised survivors, with 244 of the 283 respondents to this survey identifying as White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British, White Irish, and Other White Background.

To try and better understand issues of inequality we asked respondents to share how sexism, racism, and other forms of inequality might have affected them and their experience of abuse.

92 respondents, almost one third of those surveyed, shared that they had experienced a range of discriminatory behaviours from the perpetrator, and in some cases from family, friends, and those in positions to help victim-survivors such as the police. This

included experiencing sexism, misogyny, and ageism, including as part of inappropriate responses from services supposed to support victim-survivors.

"I received online misogynistic abuse from unknown men. Death and rape threats increased during lockdown."

"My abuser definitely bought into the misogynistic mindset that men were being discriminated against by feminism and equal opportunities. He perceived gender equality as discrimination against him."

"I feel like nobody takes women seriously. In the family court and with the police you're treated like you're hysterical. I was told by a judge that the violent rape I experienced was irrelevant to child contact proceedings. The police wrote me off as "fragile". I am not fragile; I was frightened at that time by a very abusive man. I was forced to get pregnant, forced to keep the baby and despite leaving (with very clear evidence of this abuse) I was also told this was irrelevant as "it didn't change the fact that contact was in my child's best interests". So long as it is enforced and endorsed by the family court, men will continue to abuse women in this way; force them to have children to retain lifelong contact and control. The family court is the litigious arm of the domestic abuser and women are treated like they're not even people."

"I think being stereotyped as a "young mixed race" girl in a bad relationship was hurtful"

"I asked for help from healthcare professionals as my husband needed professional care and support. I felt as a woman I was expected to care for my husband, even though I felt unsafe, and I believe if a man had asked for the same to support his wife, he would have been granted it. My husband was returned to me in an ambulance with no warning, despite having been sectioned under the mental health act because of his behaviour towards me. He had a new medication but I was not told about this and so I was understandably fearful. I wouldn't have believed this could happen in 2020 but yes it was real. Fortunately, he is much improved but occasionally when he is upset, he will become aggressive and shove me. It doesn't help I can't see my friends and family [due to the restrictions]."

"When I reported it to the police, they sent two male officers who told me to chat to my husband to try to sort things out!!"

Others felt that racism and religious discrimination played a role in the abuse they faced.

"My partner blamed me for everything and told me it was my fault. I lost my self-esteem; my social life has been affected. He used racial slurs; calling me "black monkey" made me feel unwanted. Despite my husband's abuse he told me no one will believe me because I am black and will be left homeless."

"He will manipulate our religion in an attempt to oppress me. Also, as we are of different ethnicities (but the same religion) he tries to push his cultural standards and expectations upon me, and this has intensified considerably."

"I'm Asian and my husband is British White. He used to tell me I was a racist and that my family was racist because he felt they didn't treat him appropriately. He'll threaten to call the home office on my parents and brother who were here on visas. He'll tell me I was not a good wife because I was supposed to support him and not my family, and for that I was a racist or in his words - a "selfish racist bitch."

"Racism was definitely embedded in the form of abuse I faced: there was verbal abuse related to my ethnicity, my partner made fun of my accent, made me feel like what I knew or understood about relationships was wrong based on my supposedly socially conservative background. Institutionally, I was a foreigner in a strange country with a visa. As a brown girl who had constant and severe breakdowns in public on the street, I always felt less entitled or less deserving of empathy from bystanders."

For some disability and mental health discrimination made their situation worse.

"He would never have got away with what he did if I had been physically and mentally well enough to escape. I had had major surgery in Dec 2019 and was just recovering and preparing to leave when lockdown hit. He controlled everything because I was too sick to work. He took advantage of my Asperger's, manipulating me so I believed everything he said. The police have said that I am mentally ill and I made everything up and took advantage of him."

"I believe my mental health was used as an excuse not to believe me. I was not believed at first. Even people I knew asked me: why would someone go out of their way to do what the stalker and his associates were doing to me? I felt helpless, if professionals are questioning you then what hope do I have... The perpetrator even told others it was me stalking him although I do not drive and had been in a refuge for months, miles from my home and also the stalkers home. So, I do feel like my mental health impacted on what help I got."

"I think all the abuse I have suffered is due to sexism and it is just accepted as part of society. I also think that I was more vulnerable as I have a disability and I felt that I deserved less than other people and there were a lot more barriers to leaving e.g. no suitable refuge."

This horrifying snapshot into the inequality women faced in 2020 shows the multifaceted nature of abuse and the need for a holistic approach to ending abuse. The intersectionality of abuse - that if you are a woman you are likely to experience something but if you are a woman with a disability your experience is likely to be worse - is clear in these shared experiences.

These experiences of inequality will be vitally important as we move into the post-pandemic "new normal" and try to rebuild services and improve on what was there before for victim-survivors of abuse. To end domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, structural inequality, as well as the additional impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic as showcased in this and the four thematic reports, must be addressed.

What do you wish people understood better about domestic abuse?

Finally, we wanted to give the respondents an opportunity to speak more freely on their experiences and the issues of domestic abuse during the Covid-19 Pandemic. 183 respondents (64.7%) provided answers that, whilst upsetting and difficult to read, provide us with invaluable guidance on what needs to be addressed to better educate, inform, prevent, and end domestic violence against women and children.

An overwhelming number of responses highlighted "that it [abuse] does not have to be PHYSICAL" whilst a similar number were keen to point out that "[abuse] does not discriminate."

"That it isn't just about being beaten. The coercive and controlling, and gaslighting side of the emotional abuse is horrendous to endure. I hope that people realise this is just as serious

and dangerous and I hope people understand exactly what this is. I wouldn't wish my experience on anyone."

It can happen to anyone

"It can happen to anyone. It's not a sign of being a bad wife or parent. It's the abuser who's doing the abuse and the victim isn't causing it. We're made to feel like it's our fault, so we're scared to seek help."

Others shared how abuse impacts the mental health of victim-survivors; *"in every form of abuse, victims are completely isolated and depressed and ashamed and fear the abuser."*

"The long-lasting impact. He makes me so scared, even now, after 12 years apart. How when you have kids with an abuser, it never stops! He continues to get you through them and on them. It never stops! How family courts allow the abuse to continue and how going through the family court is like being abused all over again."

It's not just as simple as leaving

Many victim-survivors shared their insight into escaping abuse and want more people to understand *"that it is not as simple as just leaving."*

"Not all professionals (GPs, Social Workers, Police etc) are fully understanding of domestic abuse. That it can happen to anyone, from any background. For example, my local domestic abuse service is run by a housing association. This gives the impression that domestic abuse is something that mainly happens to those in social housing - this just isn't true."

"It is so much harder to leave than people think- you can become attached to that person and the abuse is not all of the time - you do share some good times with that person. Sometimes it's also very difficult to identify you're being abused - especially if it's emotional abuse."

"It isn't easy to leave because that person destroys your version of reality and sense of self therefore trapping you completely until you build up enough evidence and courage to see they are wrong."

More understanding of coercive control

Many expressed a need for all aspects of society to better understand coercive control and its underpinning of all kinds of domestic abuse.

"The coercive control aspect, not the creepy parts, not the surveillance, not the stuff that makes good TV, but the emotional abuse, the fear, the real fear, of not knowing what each day is going to bring, of your heart constantly racing, sleeping with a chair under the door handle just in case, of not knowing if he is suddenly going to explode, and punch you, or pull a knife, or go crazy in the car. Nothing you say is right, everything you do is wrong. The way it wears you down, constant trickle, frog in the pan of water with the heat slowly being turned up. I wish the psychological side of things was talked about more. Withholding sex, that sort of subtle abuse, hard to pinpoint. I wish it was talked about more openly. I wish they taught about it in school. I'm nearly 50 and educated and didn't know what emotional abuse was when the GP called it in 2018. Then it took a global pandemic and my son's life being in danger to get me to wake up and leave."

"The coercive nature and how difficult it can be to start again and escape the abuser, living in fear of attacks and harassment. Financial control makes it worse. Abusers can be anyone and hide behind a persona."

"Better understanding of non-physical abuse (e.g. coercive control)"

"That an abuser may seem charismatic and a lovely person, but behind closed doors they are controlling and manipulative, and the effect is so detrimental to families."

"That just because you didn't say anything when it was happening doesn't mean that it's not real. Also, that not all abuse is physical. I can't believe what I allowed my ex-husband to do to me and the decisions that I made when I was under his control. We need people to understand that abuse takes many forms and that when you are in the middle of it, it's possible that you can be trying so hard to keep going that you aren't even able to see the abuse for yourself. We therefore need to normalise asking 'are you OK' if people see something that just doesn't seem right. I think that too many people ignore that question because they don't want to get involved and we have got to change that attitude and help people understand that every single one of us has the power to make a difference for people who are scared and not safe."

Better, more informed, support for victim-survivors

Finally, many called those who are supposed to support victim-survivors to have a better knowledge, understanding, and awareness of their duties in order to support people, for the legal system to better protect victim-survivors, and for an end to the culture of victim blaming.

"It's not just violent abuse, and other forms can impact in your life and affect you. The courts lack of acknowledgement of domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and perpetrators

should be held accountable and brought to justice. It seems because it's so common it's just normalised and generalised too much."

"Emotional abuse seems to be really overlooked. A lot of the attitudes I came across was because I wasn't beaten up or physically abused so "it wasn't as bad", but I have experienced both and for me emotional is a lot worse. The CPS really need to take into account the impact it can have on a victim and also family courts need to protect children better."

"The police need to understand the processes properly, they didn't even have it noted down that I had a restraining order. They don't understand coercive control and how it works, and they certainly have no clue about cyber stalking or technology and social media in general. The courts are just as bad, 17 breaches of the restraining order and he gets a 'building better relationships' course. Further breaches were not understood clearly by the police and they have told me that CPS have been notified of the breach but since I've had no letter from CPS, I'm now questioning whether they've even dealt with it at all"

"Victim blaming needs to stop! Anyone can be a victim. There is no specific stereotype that becomes a victim."

"I was called names and experienced victim blaming for going back to my abuser after it first came out that he was abusing me. It isn't as easy as just ending a relationship. I tried to end the relationship previously and he threatened to kill himself and pulled out a knife. He stabbed himself in the stomach and at one point the knife went through one of my fingers. I was scared that if I didn't stay with him, he would kill us both. He also tried to tell me that I was the one who stabbed him in the stomach so that I wouldn't tell the police because he would tell them it was me. Leaving isn't as easy as just walking out the door and I don't think people who haven't experienced abuse realise this and perceive people who stay with abusers are stupid."

It is clear that as a society we must do more to educate people about all aspects of abuse, believe victim-survivors, remove the stigma associated with experiencing abuse and better prosecute perpetrators of abuse. As we move into the aftermath of the pandemic and continue to see the stark impact it has had on victim-survivors, the levels and types of abuse they have experienced, and the support structures and services which are supposed to be there to help, it is clear that is a lot of work still to be done.

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Appendix - Demographics

We received 283 responses in total, of which all 283 respondents identify as women with two defining as trans. Two-thirds of our responders are aged between 31-50 years old, and two-thirds do not have a disability or long-term health condition. 70%, or just shy of three-quarters of our respondents were living with for some or all of the pandemic. Therefore, due to this survey relating directly to the impact of Covid-19 on domestic abuse, the sample was restricted to those victim-survivors able to safely access an online survey.

Age

Age Group	% respondents
16-20	1.8%
21-30	17.0%
31-40	33.6%
41-50	33.6%
51-60	12.0%
61-70	2.1%

Disability

Do you have a disability or long-term health condition?	% respondents
Do not wish to say	3.2%
No, neither	62.9%
Yes, both	5.7%
Yes, disability	3.5%
Yes, long term health condition	24.7%

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	% respondents
Any other Asian/Asian British background	1.4%
Any other Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British background	0.4%
Any other ethnic group	0.7%
Any other Mixed/ Multiple ethnic background	0.7%
Any other White background	5.7%
Asian/ Asian British Bangladeshi	0.7%
Asian/ Asian British Chinese	0.7%
Asian/ Asian British Indian	2.8%
Asian/ Asian British Pakistani	2.1%
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British African	0.7%
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British Caribbean	0.4%
Do not wish to say	1.4%
White and Asian Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups	1.1%
White and Black Caribbean	0.7%
White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British	75.3%
White Irish	5.3%

Trans

Do you define as Trans?	% respondents
Do not wish to say	0.7%
No	98.2%

Yes	1.1%
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Sexual Orientation

How would you describe your sexual orientation?	% respondents
Asexual	1.4%
Bisexual	6.0%
Do not wish to say	1.4%
Gay/lesbian	1.1%
Heterosexual/straight	89.4%
Pansexual	0.4%
No answer	0.4%

Country

Where do you live?	% respondents
Do not wish to say	1.1%
England	72.4%
France	0.4%
Ireland	1.1%
New Zealand	0.4%
Northern Ireland	6.7%
Scotland	11.0%
Wales	6.7%
Channel Islands	0.4%

Sex of Perpetrator

Is the person/people being abusive or	% respondents
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violent against you (now or in the past)	
A man	89.0%
A woman	2.1%
Multiple abusers (all men)	2.5%
Multiple abusers (all women)	0.4%
Multiple abusers (men and women)	5.7%
Trans women (but hasn't had surgery or hormones)	0.4%

Relationship to abuser

Relationship to abuser	% respondents
Current partner	34.7%
Ex-partner	75.3%
Family member	8.4%
Someone else	4.0%

Living situation

Did/do you live with an abuser during the Covid-19 pandemic	% respondents
No	29.7%
Yes - all of the time	41.3%
Yes - some of the time	29.0%