

A NO MORE REPORT



COVID-19's Global Impact on Domestic & Sexual Violence Support Services

Foreword

We are grateful for the time and generosity of NO MORE's allies and partners and all the support service organizations around the world that participated in our survey during these challenging times. Their experiences and valuable insights have informed the analysis and recommendations in this report.

Our report shows just how challenging it has been throughout this difficult year for frontline organizations supporting some of the most vulnerable: those trying to escape violence. While under tremendous stress, we have learned that support service providers stood up, innovated, and continued to help survivors as best as possible. However, the future remains uncertain.

At NO MORE, we believe that one way to overcome obstacles is to connect, share best practices and advocate together. This report shows that the experiences confronted through the pandemic were similar in all corners of the world because domestic and sexual violence is a pervasive and underprioritized issue everywhere.

We hope this report demonstrates to leaders and funders that with their support, they can start making a difference in their communities, share those results and hopefully inspire others to support the culture change that we need to eradicate the epidemic of domestic and sexual violence once and for all.

Thank you to Sarah Walker who has led the research with great passion and dedication.

Pamela Zaballa

Global Executive Director - The NO MORE Foundation



About NO MORE

The NO MORE Foundation is dedicated to ending domestic violence and sexual assault by increasing awareness, inspiring action and fueling culture change. With more than 1,700 allied organizations and over 40 state, local, and international chapters, NO MORE sparks grassroots activism, encouraging everyone—women and men, youth and adults, from all walks of life—to be part of the solution.

The Foundation creates and provides public awareness campaigns, educational resources and community organizing tools free-of-charge for anyone wanting to stop and prevent violence. First launched in 2013, NO MORE has brought together the largest coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, governmental agencies, major corporations, universities, communities and individuals, all under a common brand and a unifying symbol in support of a world free of violence.



Like the red AIDS ribbon, or the pink breast cancer awareness ribbon before it, the blue NO MORE symbol is the first overarching, unifying symbol to express universal support for ending domestic violence and sexual assault.

Survivor-inspired, developed in consultation with top marketing and branding professionals and tested with diverse audiences, the symbol's signature blue "vanishing point" evolved from the concept of zero – as in zero incidents of DV/SA.

Together with our partners and supporters, we use the NO MORE symbol to amplify the power of the domestic violence and sexual assault movement.

Executive Summary

The NO MORE Foundation has conducted a global survey that shines a light on the real issues facing support service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the survey was to determine if domestic and sexual violence service organizations were negatively or positively impacted by COVID-19. The findings represent domestic and sexual violence organizations around the world and their experience through the challenges of COVID-19 across four impact areas: services and demand, funding, staff, and the future.

The survey found that at the same time that demand for services escalated, COVID-19 impacted service providers' capacity to support victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The majority of organizations reported having to reduce or cancel services, with in-person services most affected. However, most organizations found a way to continue critical emergency services such as hotlines during the pandemic.

The report also highlights the role of COVID-19 in exacerbating the funding crisis facing the domestic and sexual violence sector worldwide. We found that organizations reported a decrease in funding during the pandemic, with individual and local funding sources most affected. We also found that the financial hit of the pandemic was worse for US organizations.

The transition to online service provision during COVID-19 had a significant effect on both clients and support workers due to the sensitive nature of working with victims and survivors of violence. The study found that staff members experienced increased isolation and a decline in mental health, whilst victims and survivors faced emotional and practical barriers in accessing vital support services. However, the survey demonstrated some positive outcomes. Despite numerous challenges, more than half of the organizations managed to sustain staff levels during COVID-19, and many organizations surveyed said they were able to innovate as a direct result of the pandemic.

Based on the findings discussed in this report, the NO MORE Foundation hopes to create a global dialogue around the need for more attention, funding and innovation to prevent domestic and sexual violence across the globe.

Key Findings

- 88% of the nonprofit organizations surveyed were impacted by COVID-19 in their ability to support people who need their services.
- 75% of those organizations had to reduce or cancel their programs or services due to COVID-19.
- At the same time that providers were struggling to maintain services, more than 63% of domestic violence organizations said that demand for their services escalated.
- 81% of organizations that responded felt that pressures on their staff had increased and 53% reported a decline in staff's mental health.
- 40% of all the organizations surveyed saw a funding decline during the pandemic and 82% believe fundraising will be even more difficult this year and next. The financial hit was worse among organizations in the United States, with more than half (54%) reporting overall funding decreases.
- Half of service providers reported that remote working during the pandemic created difficulties getting in contact with clients.
- Despite numerous challenges, more than half of the organizations managed to sustain staff levels during COVID-19.
- In more than a quarter of organizations, members of the Executive Board or Steering Committee got involved with day-to-day activities during the crisis.
- The survey also demonstrated positive outcomes. Most organizations found ways to continue critical emergency services, such as hotlines and shelters, and 71% of organizations surveyed said they were able to innovate as a direct result of the pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a significant strain on domestic and sexual violence services around the world. Yet, despite consistent evidence of the pressures facing these organizations, there are no studies that look at the global impact of the pandemic on these frontline services. The NO MORE Foundation has filled this research gap by building a global snapshot of the challenges faced by organizations that are working to prevent and end domestic and sexual violence during the pandemic. These responses contain a critical source of practitioner-led evidence and represent the voice of organizations working on the frontline during the COVID-19 crisis. The report outlines the specific areas of COVID-19's impact on services and demand, funding, staff, and the future of the sector.

Methodology

NO MORE designed and distributed a survey to domestic and sexual violence service organizations in our network of Allies, Chapters, US State Coalitions, and the NO MORE global list of domestic and sexual violence organizations. The survey was open from 1st to 25th of February 2021 and received 111 responses, from which the following data is drawn. The survey had a geographically diverse sample that comprises organizations in 31 countries. The US had the largest number of respondents such that North America represents 60% of the sample, followed by Europe (25%), Africa (6%), Asia (5%), Oceania (2%) and South America (1%). The sample was predominantly from small organizations: 85% of respondents had less than 50 employees; 9% had 50-200 employees; and 5% were larger organizations with over 200 employees.

Background

Domestic and Sexual Violence During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing prevention measures saw 90 countries go into lockdown, with 4 billion people sheltering in the 'safety' of their homes.¹ However, the pandemic has been a stark reminder that home is not always a safe place. The combination of lockdown and mobility restrictions in a context of widespread unemployment, fear, and disrupted social networks has fostered an environment conducive to domestic violence and sexual assault. Quarantine measures further compound the risk for victims by reducing their access to support services and life outside the home. As cases of violence surged around the globe, the United Nations termed the crisis the 'Shadow Pandemic'.²

Yet, the widespread phenomenon of domestic and sexual violence existed long before the pandemic. Globally, an estimated one in three women have experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime.³ Data for male victims of violence is less available, however in the US 1 in 10 men have experienced rape, physical violence or stalking by a partner.⁴

During lockdown, cases of violence against women increased by an estimated 25% worldwide,⁵ and doubled in some countries.⁶ Whereas, a recent report from the US found that incidence of domestic violence increased by 8.1% after pandemic-related lockdown orders were imposed.⁷ However, the lack of robust and timely international data for cross-country comparisons has been made worse by lockdown measures, increasing the invisibility and widespread underreporting of violence. Many victims suffer in silence or are unable to access support services, so figures on the prevalence of violence during the pandemic are likely to only represent the 'tip of the iceberg'.

- France saw a 30% jump in domestic violence cases during lockdown.⁸
- In Brazil, a drop-in center witnessed a 40-50% surge in domestic violence cases attributed to lockdown isolation.⁹
- Police data across US cities indicated a 10-27% increase in domestic violence while stay-at-home orders were implemented.¹⁰

Literature Review: Domestic and Sexual Violence Support Services During COVID-19

The pandemic has put significant strain on the organizations supporting the victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The overwhelming majority of literature to date focuses on the experiences of victim-survivors. Service organizations have not been given an opportunity to share the unique impact the pandemic has had on services, demand, funding, staffing and future sustainability. This review has highlighted a small number of studies that go beyond identifying violence trends, by reflecting the challenges of frontline service providers.

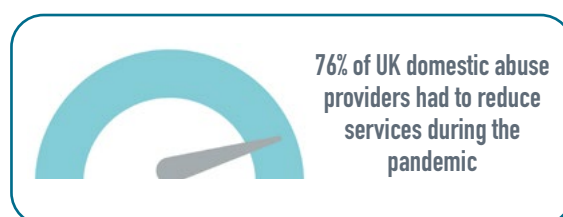
In the UK, SafeLives conducted a survey in March 2020 to assess the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted the Domestic Abuse sector.¹¹ The survey found that 76% of UK domestic abuse providers had to reduce services during the pandemic. Similar concerns were mirrored in an April 2020 Women's Aid survey of domestic abuse support services across the UK which found that, during the pandemic, 84.4% of respondents reduced services.¹² When SafeLives conducted a follow-up survey in June to examine the continued impact of the pandemic, they found fewer organizations reporting reduced service delivery (52% compared to 76%).¹³



Similar findings were echoed in research across the globe. For instance, in the US, a June 2020 study researched the impact of COVID-19 on community-based sexual and domestic violence programs across Arizona.¹⁴ They identified funding shortfalls across all programs, and found that shelter capacity was reduced by approximately 50% across Arizona. Whereas, in June 2020 a Canadian study drew particular attention to the different pressures on directors, supervisors and managers compared to other positions such as direct service providers and volunteers during the pandemic.¹⁵ Furthermore, in March, Women's Safety NSW¹⁶ examined the core issues facing domestic and sexual violence support workers in Australia, including:

- Increased service demand
- Transition to remote service provision
- Virus-specific workplace health and safety
- Unmet need for increased support

The research reviewed predominantly focuses on organizations in high-income countries. This may be due in part to search parameters excluding non-English studies, yet it also reflects global inequalities in research and knowledge production. However, this review highlights a few studies which drew on data from middle-income countries. For instance, a rapid assessment of programs in Turkey and the Western Balkans in May found that the lack of core funding undermined organizations' resilience to the sudden crisis and the majority of non-core services were reduced.¹⁷ Moreover, a rapid assessment of domestic violence services in Iraq in April-May 2020 pointed to service reduction, a lack of organizational capacity to follow up on all cases, and communication barriers with survivors during the pandemic.¹⁸



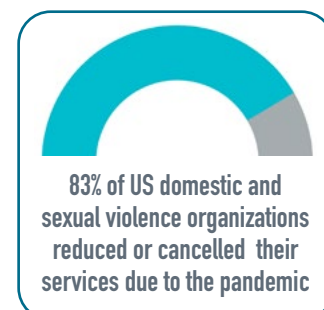
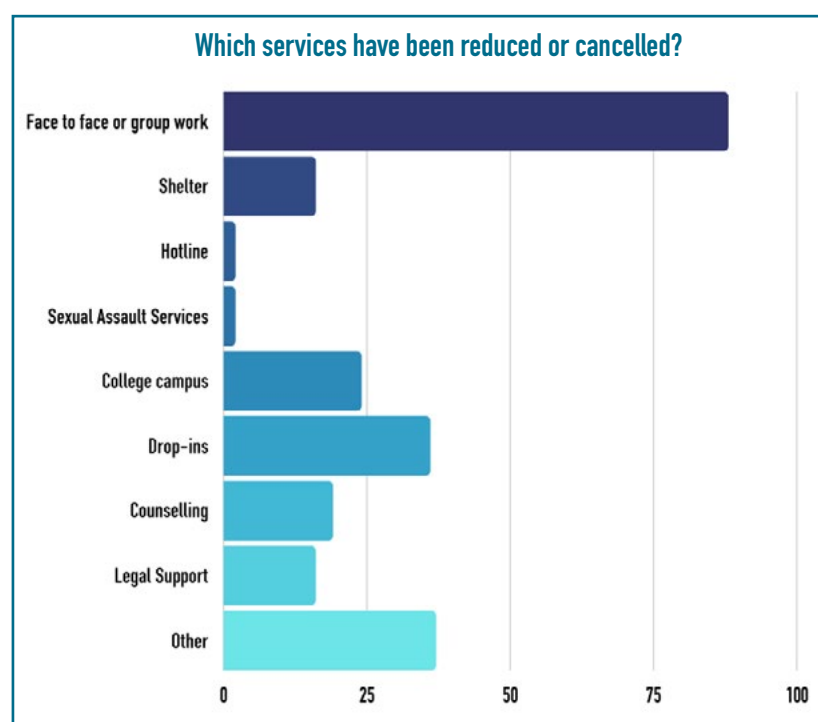
NO MORE Survey Findings

Our report findings are divided into four key impact areas that reflect the experiences of domestic and sexual violence organizations during this crisis: services and demand, funding, staff and the future.

Impact on Services and Demand

Our survey found that 88% of domestic and sexual violence organizations were impacted by COVID-19 in their ability to support people who need their services. This is particularly significant because it tells us that organizations around the globe are experiencing the same effects of the crisis. Of these, 85% said they experienced a significant impact whereas only 15% experienced a minor impact from COVID-19.

Most alarmingly, considering the direct impact of the pandemic on victims, 75% of organizations said that they had been forced to reduce or cancel their programs or services due to COVID-19. The figure for the US was even higher: 83% of US domestic and sexual violence organizations reduced or cancelled their services due to the pandemic. These providers were then asked which services have been impacted - the breakdown of their responses can be seen in the chart below.



Organizations reported an impact on all listed service types, however face-to-face appointments or group work were the most affected: 88% of organizations reported reductions or cancellations. This is not surprising given the global shift to online provision of services during lockdown measures, yet it is significant given that before the pandemic the services provided in this sector were primarily in-person. In addition to those shown in the chart, 37% of respondents listed 'Other' services that were impacted which include outreach and advocacy, shelter, housing and self-defense programs. The data also appears to show that emergency services such as hotlines were prioritized during lockdown. For example, of the 64 organizations that provide a hotline, only 5% of these reported reducing or cancelling their hotline service during the pandemic. On the other hand, it may be that services such as hotlines were not prioritized but rather they were not reduced

because the online infrastructure existed prior to the crisis, unlike face-to-face services which needed to be innovated to continue.

At the same time that providers were struggling to offer services, more than 3 in 5 (63%) domestic violence organizations reported an escalation in demand for their services. This finding echoes the global conversation around the increased prevalence of domestic violence during the pandemic. Given the limited window that victims have to report domestic abuse or reach out for help, and that isolating with an abusive partner will further limit this, the increased demand points to the sheer number of victims affected. However, it is important to point out that service-use data is not a reliable indicator of whether violence has increased.¹⁹ For instance, under-reporting of violence and under-utilization of services significantly affect domestic and sexual violence data.

Impact on Funding

Given the scale and pervasiveness of domestic and sexual violence around the world, the sector has historically faced a sustained funding crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn increased attention to the overall problems of victims living with perpetrators, resulting in many governments, companies and individuals supporting the cause during the crisis. However, we found that 2 in 5 (41%) organizations reported a decrease in funding during the pandemic. Of these, three quarters (76%) saw a fall in individual giving and 62% saw a fall in local government funding during the crisis. Respondents also pointed to the increased competition for grants and the reallocation of resources and funding away from the domestic and sexual violence sector towards the virus-prevention effort. For example, one organization commented:

Available donors and funding are focused on recovery of infected persons rather than domestic or sexual violence.

Women Safe House Sustenance Initiative (Nigeria)



62% of organizations saw a fall in local government funding during the crisis



88% of domestic and sexual violence organisations were impacted by COVID-19



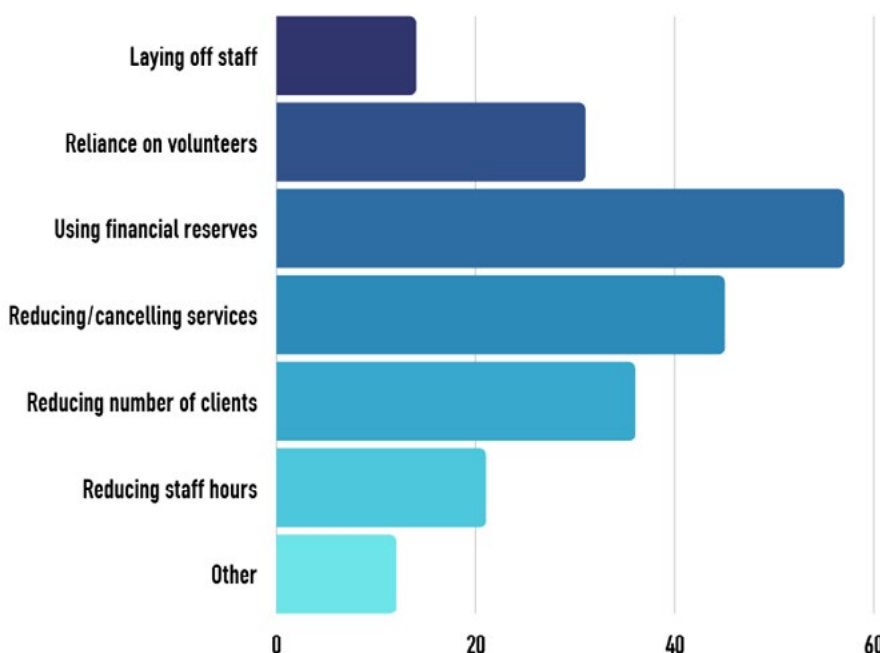
During the COVID-19 pandemic, 3 in 5 domestic violence organizations reported an escalation in demand for their services

Service providers were also asked about the impact of decreased funding on their organization during COVID-19. Of those that discussed decreased funding, 45% of domestic and sexual violence organizations said that they had to reduce or stop services due to COVID-19 funding shortages. While, more than a third (36%) reported that they had to reduce the number of clients they support as a direct result of funding. The other reported impacts of funding decreases are listed in the chart below. In the US:

- More than half (54%) of domestic and sexual violence organizations reported a decrease in funding during COVID-19
- Roughly a third (34%) of domestic and sexual violence organizations reported a decrease in local funding
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of domestic and sexual violence organizations saw a decrease in corporate donations

All respondents that reported a reduction in government funding in this survey were US organizations

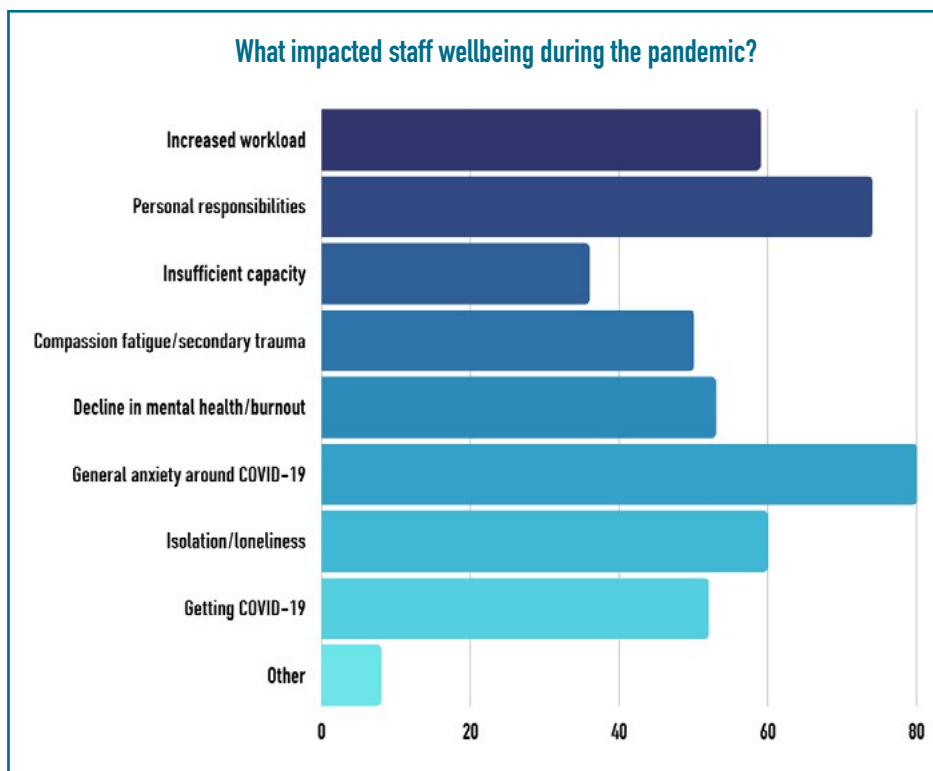
What impact have funding decreases had on your organization?



Impact on Staff

Staffing Levels and Wellbeing

Providing support to domestic and sexual violence victims is difficult and often very emotional work even in the best of times. Responses to our survey showed that roughly 4 in 5 (81%) organizations felt that pressures on their staff had increased due to COVID-19. The following chart summarises the factors that impacted staff wellbeing during the pandemic.



4 in 5 organizations felt that pressures on their staff had increased due to COVID-19



53% of domestic violence organizations reported that COVID-19 has caused a decline in mental health of staff

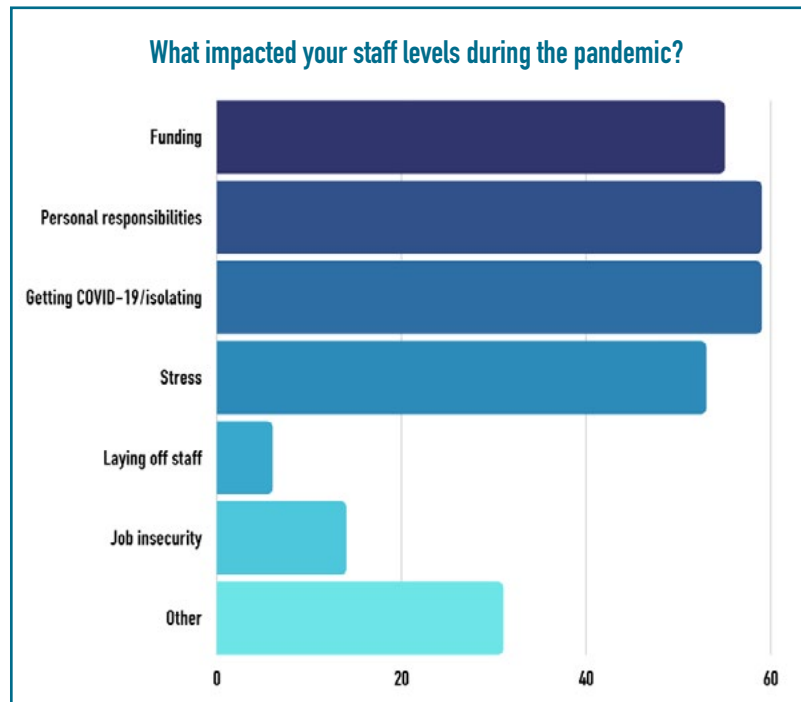
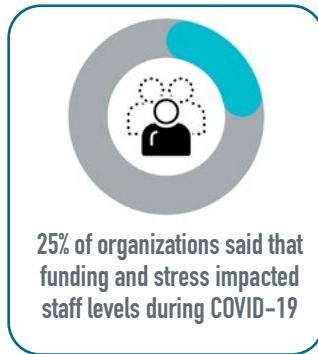
Of these respondents, more than 1 in 2 (53%) domestic violence organizations reported that COVID-19 has caused a decline in mental health of staff or work-related burnout.

The nature of this work means that staff provide emotional support by listening to victims' stories, many of which involve terrifying acts of abuse, resulting in potential burnout or secondary trauma of staff. The unique complexities of working with clients who face a real and present danger of violence means that the transition to remote working has had a significant effect on both the client and the support worker. Moreover, staff working from home do not have access to emotional support of their co-workers, further compounding the feelings of isolation as demonstrated by the 60% of respondents reporting isolation and loneliness.

Based on the aforementioned challenges facing staff, we also asked organizations whether their levels of staffing had been affected by the

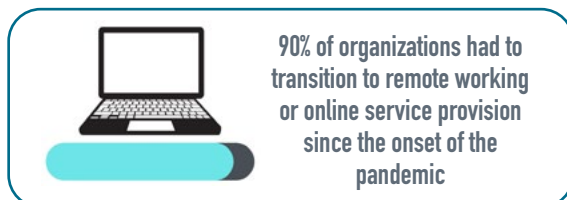
pandemic. The results show that more than half (55%) of organizations managed to sustain staff levels during COVID-19. The data for the US shows that 60% of US domestic and sexual violence organizations managed to sustain their staffing levels during the crisis.

However, the survey pointed to a multitude of factors impacting staff levels in the Domestic and Sexual Violence sector which also reflect the wider impact of COVID-19 prevention measures that have been felt in most sectors around the world. These include personal responsibilities such as childcare during lockdown and direct effects of the virus such as getting COVID-19 or isolating due to health concerns. Out of the total survey respondents, roughly a quarter of domestic and sexual violence organizations also said that funding and stress impacted their staff levels during the pandemic. The following chart gives a breakdown of the reported reasons given by the organizations whose staff levels were affected.



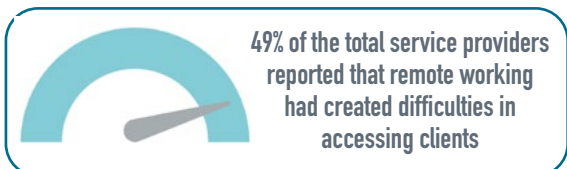
Remote Working

The emergence of COVID-19 and the shutdown of non-essential services across the globe placed added strain on domestic and sexual violence services. Our survey found that 90% of organizations had to transition to remote working or online service provision since the onset of the pandemic. Given the nature and sensitivity of domestic and sexual violence support services,



online service provision can create obstacles to effective service delivery including practical and emotional barriers for survivors.

Moreover, half (49%) of the total service providers reported that remote working during this crisis had created difficulties in accessing clients. This reflects how COVID-19 quarantine measures may increase victims' exposure to perpetrators for



extended periods of time, compounding their isolation by preventing them from accessing vital support services. Similar findings were shown in the Women's Aid survey²⁰ in the UK that revealed staff concerns for survivors' wellbeing,

in particular the challenges of not being able to contact clients in abusive relationships due to isolation or lockdown. In addition, our survey found that 46% of organizations were concerned about client safety as a result of online service provision. One respondent commented:

There will need to be a period of gaining trust with the communities that were not as equipped to get the services/resources they needed virtually. There are so many survivors that were not in a position nor had the tools to get help or make virtual appointments, with their abusive partner required to be in the home as well.

CONNECT, Inc. (US)

A transition to online service provision during the pandemic may also magnify existing inequalities in terms of access to digital resources. This was mentioned by one of the organizations:

Victims, especially in rural areas, do not have the access to receive services. Without continued awareness, training, and direct services, our exposure has decreased. Victims with no internet and/or cell services have been taken back many years.

Services to Abused Families, Inc. (US)

The ability to report violence is a privilege that only those with access to a phone or internet can afford, whether that is due to economic factors or the result of controlling behaviors by the perpetrator.

Leadership and Strategy

We received 86 responses from people that held leadership positions at their organization who answered questions on their experiences of the COVID-19 crisis. The findings revealed that in more than a quarter (28%) of organizations, members of the Executive Board or Steering Committee got involved with day-to-day activities during the crisis. We also asked those in leadership positions how the pandemic had affected their wellbeing.



28% of organizations reported that board members or members of the steering committee got involved with day to day activities during the crisis

The results show that those in leadership positions had similar experiences to the rest of the staff:

- 43% reported experiencing pressures relating to personal responsibilities
- 48% experienced compassion fatigue
- 43% reported a decline in mental health

This contrasts with the Canadian survey²¹ which highlighted how leadership pressures are predominantly focused on organizational sustainability, instead of dealing with the emotional impact of service disruptions.



71% of organizations said they were able to innovate as a direct result of the pandemic

A positive outcome of COVID-19 is that it appears to be fueling innovation: 71% of domestic and sexual violence organizations said they were able to innovate as a direct result of the pandemic. These findings suggest that when seemingly insurmountable challenges are placed on the sector, it has been able to demonstrate resilience through increased innovation. This may have positive implications for the future of the sector by increasing the capacity to help hard-to-reach victims. One respondent commented on this:

We have learned a great deal. We are now competent to deliver training, classes and groups on virtual platforms. I doubt we would have developed this expertise without the necessity due to the pandemic. We can now (even post-COVID) reach survivors in all weather, wherever they are, etc.

Domestic Violence Services, Inc., (US)

Impact on the Future

Finally, we asked organizations about their concerns for the next year. The results show that roughly 4 in 5 (82%) organizations believe that fundraising will be more difficult this year (2021) and the year ahead (2022). We then asked respondents to explain why they believe fundraising will become more challenging. The most common themes discussed included:

- the impact of the crisis on donor countries and companies;
- economic consequences of COVID-19;
- cancellation of in-person fundraising events;
- reallocation of funding to the COVID-19 prevention effort; and,
- increased competition for funding.



82% of organizations believe that fundraising will be more difficult in the upcoming financial year

Service providers were also asked for their opinion on the future of the domestic and sexual violence sector as the world emerges from the pandemic. We found that 37% of organizations believe that the sector will have deteriorated as a result of the pandemic. When asked for the reasons behind their belief that the sector will deteriorate, the organizations predominantly framed their answers around concern for victims due to increased prevalence of violence. The other most common answers were related to funding shortages and reduced capacity of services due to the long-term effects of the crisis.

The pandemic opened possibilities to apply for funding to prevent the spread of the disease, and now, seeing the end of it, there might be fewer possibilities for project funding and still the costs for protection will stay the same or increase.

Crisis Centre "Hope" (Republic of North Macedonia)

I think a lot of agencies, especially smaller and/or more rural ones just don't have the financial and human resources necessary to innovate and then to sustain/expand those innovations into the future.

Domestic Violence Intervention of Lebanon County, Inc. (US)

Conversely, 30% of domestic and sexual violence organizations were more optimistic about the future, suggesting there has or will be an improvement due to COVID-19. The reasons provided for this belief mostly discussed innovation, which is not surprising given that 97% of these respondents reported being able to innovate during the crisis. For example:

During the pandemic we have become more creative in ways to provide service. We have had to be ready to pivot at a moment's notice in order to provide services and reach those who could benefit from the support we provide.

Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (US)

Larger organizations (over 50 employees) were generally more optimistic about the future of the domestic and sexual violence sector - with only 21% anticipating a deterioration in the sector compared to 40% of smaller organizations.

It is difficult to know what the future will bring. On the one side, the sector has innovated and come up with quick responses for urgent demands; on the other side, we are expecting an economic crisis for governments and companies. One thing that we do know is that domestic and sexual violence organizations have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of the lessons learned will shape the future of how they provide services and protect victims.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the global lack of preparedness to respond to the pre-existing and persistent issues of domestic and sexual violence. The spread of COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on those experiencing violence and put significant pressure on the services and staff working to protect victims. Services are currently working at or beyond capacity to address domestic and sexual violence during the pandemic.

This report showcased the challenges facing the domestic and sexual violence sector during COVID-19. The survey findings revealed that when domestic and sexual violence is at its worst, the system set up to respond and save lives is itself struggling to survive. It also showed that organizations have the capability to adapt and innovate, but likely need more support and funding to do so effectively in the future.

The NO MORE Foundation recommends:

Service and Demand

- Domestic and sexual violence take many lives each year. Governments must ensure that support is ubiquitous and not based on your zip code. Early intervention can save lives and it must be easy and safe to access for all in need.
- Services have decreased as a result of the pandemic. Governments must ensure that service provision is therefore part of any recuperation package after COVID-19.

Funding

- The funding process of governments, donors, and civil society in all countries should also support small providers who were the hardest hit by the pandemic.
- Innovation focused on technology needs to continue in the domestic and sexual violence sector. The pandemic proved that service provision models can change but it will require greater investment if we want to see long term impact.

Staffing

- Staff are at burnout levels and facing crisis fatigue. There must be mental health and secondary trauma support for all frontline staff working for domestic and sexual violence service organizations during COVID-19 and beyond.

The Future

- Comprehensive and large scale global research on effective strategies to prevent domestic and sexual violence must be conducted.
- The domestic and sexual violence organizations should aspire to continue working in a collaborative manner, not only to meet increased demand but also to influence policy, funding and sustainability of the sector.
- Domestic and sexual violence services must be a crucial part of a future playbook on how to handle a pandemic.

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