

## The impact of Covid-19 on helplines – April to June 2020

Over the past three months, from April to June, we have asked Helplines Partnership members about the impact of Covid-19 on their organisation and service.

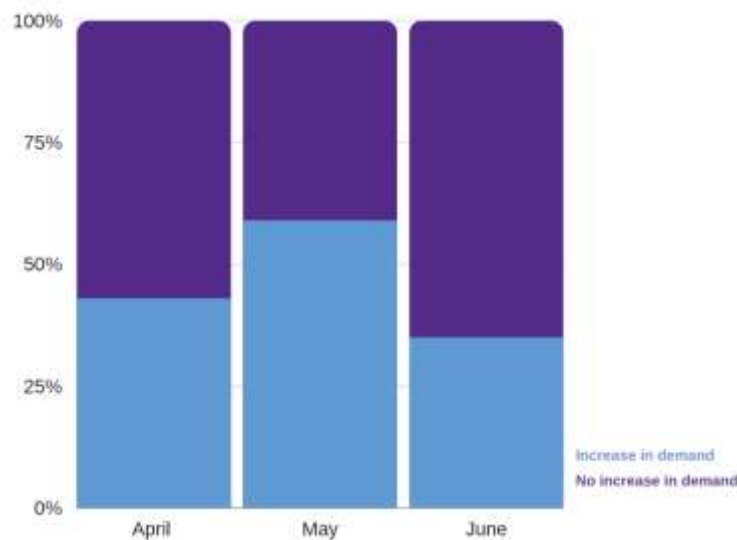
In April, in conversations with members we learned that for one, their calls had increased by three times the usual number. Another helpline said they had seen a 30% increase in contacts and another, had received three months of calls in three days. One domestic abuse helpline reported a 15% decrease in calls – the reasons could be complex with self-isolation and staying at home with family. Callers may not be able to get the support they need.

In May, members were reporting an increase in online support being offered through webchat, online meet ups and more online. Concerns about team wellbeing, funding and how to adapt their services as we emerge from lockdown were common amongst those who took part in the survey.

Safeguarding was something that members raised in June’s responses particularly in their concerns. Team wellbeing continues to be a concern for organisations as does funding. Confusion over government guidance, as well as different guidance in the regions became more of an issue this month. As did issues with helpline technology and the implications if it fails or is unable to cope with increased demand.

### Changes in demand for helpline services

Of members who took part in the survey, in April, 43% said they had experienced an increase in demand for their service during the previous month.

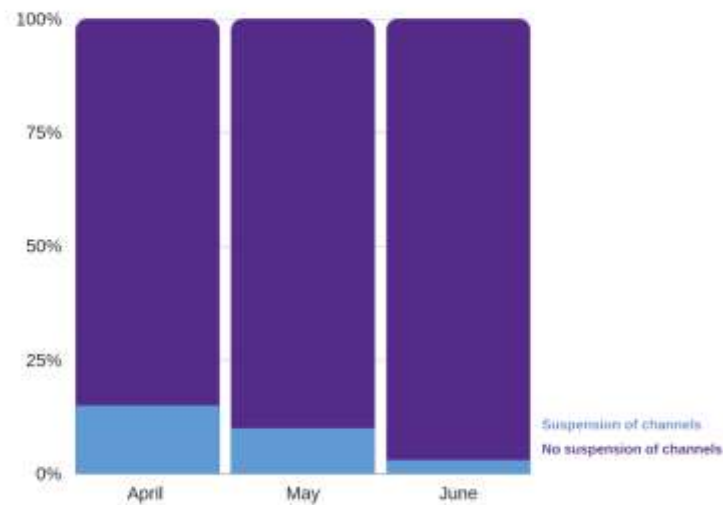


	Increase	No increase
<b>April</b>	43%	57%
<b>May</b>	59%	41%
<b>June</b>	35%	65%

## Suspension of channels

In line with social distancing measures and the UK wide lockdown, members were reporting having to suspend face-to-face, 1-2-1 work and group sessions.

Self-isolation of helpline team members and health welfare concerns meant that some helplines were unable to provide the same level of service due to reduced staff and volunteer numbers. Issues with helpline technology, problems with their phone provider meant that calls couldn't be diverted to teams working from home all impacted on service provision.



	<b>Suspension of channels</b>	<b>No suspension of channels</b>
<b>April</b>	15%	85%
<b>May</b>	10%	90%
<b>June</b>	3%	97%

## Changes to operating hours

Over the past three months many helplines reported that they have maintained their usual hours.

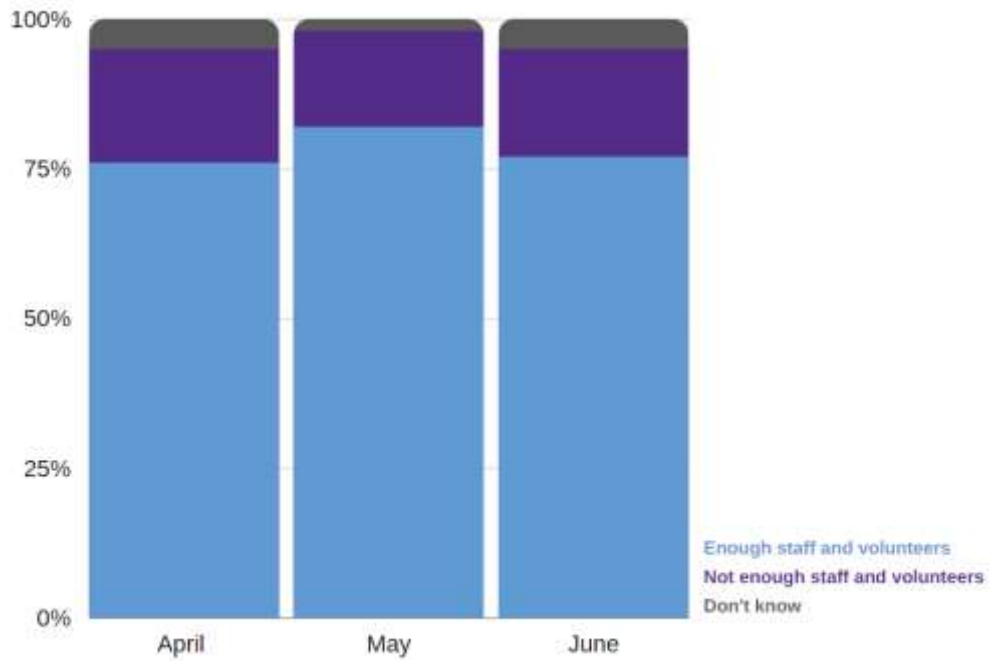
Of those that did have to change, and reduce their hours, for some this meant the suspension of phone services altogether on an ad-hoc basis, stopping the service two hours earlier than normal and another said that they were now providing a service for over 20 hours less than previously.

For those increasing their hours this ranged from an additional 50 hours a week to an extra 4 hours. In June, one member who had increased their hours in March and April said they had returned to normal in May.

	<b>Increase hours Yes/No</b>		<b>Reduce hours Yes/No</b>	
<b>April</b>	15%	85%	11%	89%
<b>May</b>	23%	77%	5%	95%
<b>June</b>	13%	87%	15%	85%

### Staff and volunteer numbers

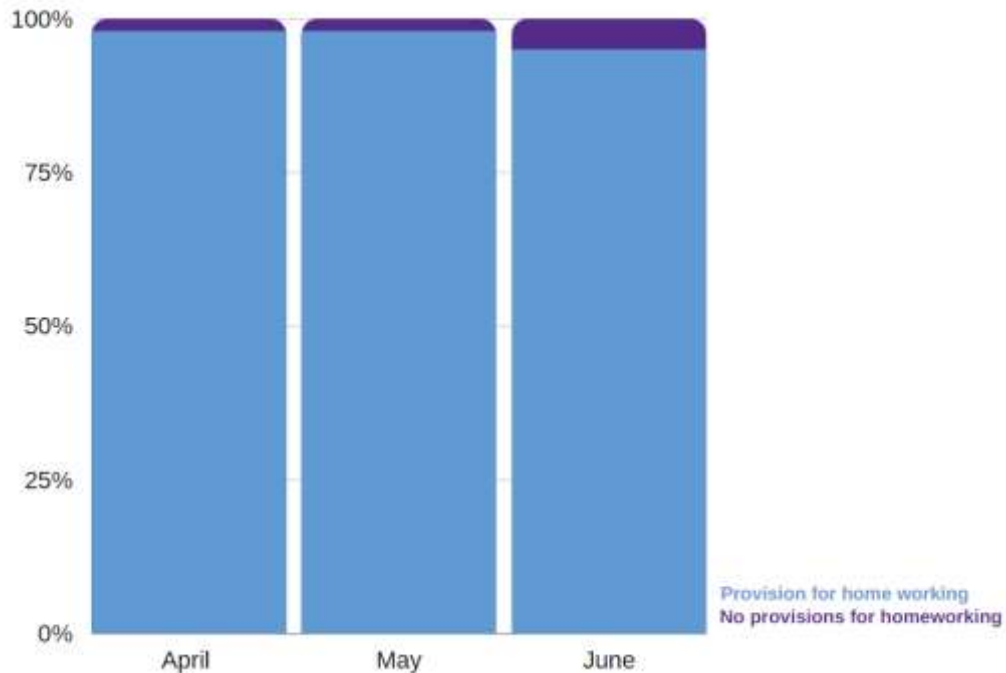
We asked members if they had enough staff and volunteers to cope with the current demand most reported that they did, which is positive and shows a good level of resilience.



	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>April</b>	76%	19%	5%
<b>May</b>	82%	16%	2%
<b>June</b>	77%	18%	5%

## Remote working

We asked members if they had the provisions and systems in place to be able to transfer helpline services from teams working from an office base to remote, home working.



	Yes	No
<b>April</b>	98%	2%
<b>May</b>	98%	2%
<b>June</b>	95%	5%

## Key concerns for helplines

Each month we asked members to share their top three concerns in relation to coronavirus. As the pandemic progressed these changed although there were common threads that ran through those first three months including caller and team welfare, lack of organisations to signpost to, issues around helpline technology and funding.

In April, the broad themes were:

- Keeping up to date with advice, information and legislation
- Staff and volunteer welfare and caller wellbeing
- Helpline demand, capacity, complexity of calls, quality of support and lack of other organisations for signposting
- Out of helpline remit, changes to type of calls
- Moving to home or remote working, support and technology
- Resourcing, impact, sustainability, reduction in volunteers and funding
- Risk and safety

In May, the broad themes were:

- Service provision after lockdown – with new working requirements
- Wellbeing – callers and helpline teams
- Helpline demand and capacity
- Moving to home or remote working, support and technology
- Resourcing, impact, sustainability and funding
- Keeping up to date with advice, information and legislation
- Changes in type of calls
- Deteriorating mental health
- The speed of the changes required
- Lack of other organisations for signposting

In June, the broad themes were:

- Wellbeing and welfare – helpline teams and callers
- Funding
- Confusion over government guidance
- Technology
- Demand for services
- Safeguarding
- Impact of social distancing and having enough staff in the office to respond to calls
- Impact on furloughed staff – feeling disillusionment and exclusion
- Calls beyond the remit of the service
- Change in the way people are contacting services – more text based contacts