

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 19 MARCH 2020



Statement on COVID-19 – Scottish Women's Aid

Women and children will be disproportionately affected by, and bear the burdens of, the coronavirus pandemic. The impact of this will mirror the inequalities embedded in our everyday lives: we are more likely to have part-time and precarious employment, to head single-parent households, to depend on social security benefit, to do unpaid caring work. And to be missing from the tables where power is wielded and resources distributed.

As we as a nation prepare to weather the pandemic, we must not lose sight of the specific challenges for children and women experiencing domestic abuse and for the services desperately working to support those children and women in this environment. Women make up a significant percentage of key frontline workers in this crisis – healthcare, social care, cleaning, teaching, retail and more. In terms of protecting and supporting the public, the women staffing Women's Aid services are also key here and national and local authorities must engage in contingency planning for these services too.

Some women who live with an abuser will feel increased anxiety around the prospect of self-isolation and social distancing, or even quarantine, in a house with an abuser. Or, for the many victim/survivors who do not live with their abusers, they may feel an increased level of fear at the prospect of their abuser knowing that they are at home, and the possibility for further surveillance that this creates. As such, the fact that Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline remains available 24/7 will be a lifeline and source of encouragement to many.

We also have concerns about the impact of the coronavirus on children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. We know from the children and young people using our services that school and nursery can often feel like the safest places to be when they and their mothers are experiencing domestic abuse. The imminent closure of these spaces, as well as other community spaces where children and young people get to enjoy their freedom, will have particular impact on the safety and wellbeing of those experiencing domestic abuse.

Many things are uncertain, but what we do know is that how women and children access support and how our services offer that support is likely to change over the coming weeks. Police, the health service and local authorities will be under increasing pressure. At Scottish Women's Aid, we are supporting our local groups to manage risk and to continue to provide their services to the best of their ability, keeping the safety of their staff in mind.

For some Women's Aid groups, this pandemic means moving to new ways of working – including providing their service over the phone, online, by text or by email. Women seeking support during this time should still reach out to their local Women's Aid group, contact details for all of them are available [on our website](#). Our staff can still help with the same safety planning, emotional support and referrals for

other services that they would do in person, and some groups are still running in-person appointments. Individual groups' responses are under constant review, and each group will make decisions about the provision of their service based on information as it becomes available.

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline is also available 24/7 via phone on 0800 027 1234, email helpline@sdafmh.org.uk or web chat at www.sdafmh.org.uk. Specially trained staff are available to offer support and information for anyone experiencing domestic abuse, those concerned about someone else and professionals with questions.

In all of this, frontline services, the police and the justice system must be particularly attuned to the dynamics of domestic abuse and the ways that it restricts the freedoms of the women, children and young people who experience it. Our website has a wealth of information on it and we would encourage professionals with questions about their practice during this time to reach out to us.

The Women's Aid movement in Scotland is built on the shoulders of women who, when faced with intense challenges, found a way. In the face of great uncertainty now, we will do the same, and our commitment to the protection of women, children and young people remains steadfast.

For further information, contact Megan Gordon (External Affairs Officer at Scottish Women's Aid) on media@womensaid.scot