

The impact of Coronavirus on vulnerable children

On average there has been a **25% increase in calls** to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, with some days demonstrating 120% more calls than normal.ⁱ

More than **800,000 children** across the UK experienced **domestic abuse** over the last year.ⁱⁱ

In some areas, there has been a **50% drop in referrals** to children's social careⁱⁱⁱ, due to children becoming invisible through the closing of schools and other public services where they might ordinarily be identified as being at risk.

Coronavirus is putting huge amounts of financial, emotional and practical strain on families with **1.5million new claims being made for Universal Credit** welfare payments since 16 March when people were first urged to Stay Home. This is over 1million more than normal.^{iv}

Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England has said that *"Sadly, when schools and services reopen, there is expected to be a surge of referrals to social services, as problems that were hidden during lockdown are finally identified or disclosed."*^v

Some agencies and local authorities are already reporting sharp increases in demand for foster care placements, with one agency from Bolton reporting a **20% rise in placement requests** in March compared to February.^{vi}

42% of foster carers are over the age of **55**, making them vulnerable to the impact of Coronavirus.^{vii}

Around **200,000 children across the UK** are currently living with kinship carers, such as grandparents or friends.^{viii} In addition to the vulnerabilities of many foster carers, **around half of all kinship carers are grandparents** and a significant proportion are over the age of 70.^{ix} If kinship carers become unable to continue caring for these children, they may have to enter the care system.

Prior to Coronavirus, it was estimated that the **UK needed to recruit 8,600 foster families** to meet demand, with England estimated to need a further **7,220 foster families** over the next year.^x

Wiltshire Council alone is looking to recruit **100 foster carers** over the next three years in order to meet demand.^{xi}

The Department for Education has recognized that Coronavirus may lead to a shortage of foster carers in many areas, stating that *"We recognise that fostering services may want to bring in more emergency foster carers to help build capacity within their services in case of additional demand during this period. We would encourage them to do this."*^{xii}

It has been estimated that the **attainment gap** between disadvantaged children and their better-off peers could widen by as much as **75%** due to the Coronavirus outbreak.^{xiii}

ⁱ The impact of the crisis on children; Home Affairs Select Committee Report; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/321/32105.htm>

ⁱⁱ See (i)

ⁱⁱⁱ ADCS President: children's social care referrals down by half; <https://www.lgplus.com/services/children/adcs-president-childrens-social-care-referrals-down-by-up-to-half-23-04-2020/>

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- ^{iv} UK gets 1.5million Universal Credit Claims since Lockdown; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-21/u-k-gets-1-5-million-universal-credit-claims-since-lockdown>
- ^v Lockdown babies: children born during the Coronavirus crisis; Children’s Commissioner for England; <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/cco-lockdown-babies.pdf>
- ^{vi} Coronavirus sees more kids going into foster care in Bolton; <https://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/18385151.coronavirus-sees-kids-going-foster-care-bolton/>
- ^{vii} <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-foster-care-children-sick-pay-a9500386.html>
- ^{viii} The prevalence and characteristics of children growing up with relatives in the UK; https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/files/190703751/Briefing_Paper_001.pdf
- ^{ix} Kinship Carers’ experiences during the Coronavirus crisis; Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>
- ^x Home for Good Statistics; <https://homeforgood.org.uk/statistics>
- ^{xi} A big thank you to all of Wiltshire’s foster carers; <https://www.spirefm.co.uk/news/local-news/3103002/a-big-thank-you-to-all-of-wiltshires-foster-carers/>
- ^{xii} Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children’s social care services; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>
- ^{xiii} Coronavirus: Attainment gap could widen by 75%, DfE official warns; <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-attainment-gap-could-widen-by-75-dfe-official-warns/>