

# How do we keep family violence perpetrators 'in view' during the COVID-19 lockdown?

April 28 2020, by Kate Fitz-Gibbon, Jessica Burley and Silke Meyer

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Over the past few weeks, there has been [increasing awareness](#) of the heightened risk of family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there has been a silence around perpetrators—in terms of the justice system's ability to hold them to account during the crisis and the wider [family](#) violence system's need to keep them "in view."

Both are critical to manage and monitor the heightened risk and danger to women and children during this period of uncertainty and isolation.

## Keeping perpetrators 'in view'

In 2016, a [government advisory panel report](#) on reducing violence against women recommended numerous steps to hold perpetrators to account and more support to change their behaviors.

Since then, all Australian states and territories have implemented family violence reforms to ensure numerous "check points" are embedded in their systems to keep perpetrators "in view" at all times.

Keeping perpetrators "in view" refers to the process of identifying, assessing, monitoring and managing their risk over time.

This notion of increased [perpetrator](#) visibility relies on coordination and information sharing between a range of men's services, criminal justice agencies, family violence specialists and other [support services](#), such as those dealing with mental health, alcohol and drugs.

But these responses have been significantly hampered by the COVID-19 restrictions, which limit the ability of victims to seek help and highlight the need for others to step in and [report suspected abuse](#).

This raises the very real risk that new perpetrators will remain invisible for longer. Patterns of escalation among known perpetrators may also go "unchecked" unless they are monitored during this time of heightened risk.

## Fewer men's services during lockdown

One of the key ways known family violence perpetrators are held to account and kept in view is through [men's behavior change programs](#) (MBCPs).

These programs require men to attend weekly, group-based sessions, as well as engage in short or long-term case management programs.

An immediate impact of the coronavirus restrictions has been the suspension of some face-to-face men's services and many MBCPs. While this has not stopped family violence interventions altogether, it does make known abusers less visible and may prevent them from getting the support they need.

Some men's services are seeing a surge in demand for telephone services. Coinciding with the beginning of the lockdown last month, [the Men's Referral Service](#), a national telephone counselling service operated by [No To Violence](#), has seen an alarming increase in calls from perpetrators of family violence.

This included a [94% increase](#) in phone traffic and an average 20% increase in time spent with callers.

Despite the increased need, resources are still lacking. The [federal government](#) has [announced](#) a \$1.1 billion boost in funding for mental health services, Medicare assistance and domestic violence support.

But this package does not specify additional funding to the Men's Referral Service. Instead, the service makes do with funding from three states (Victoria, NSW and Tasmania).

In the absence of increased funding and availability of men's services,

[proactive policing](#) and random household checks of known, high-risk perpetrators will be critical during the lockdown.

Police resources have also been strained by the coronavirus crisis, but these spot checks should be seen as a priority. Victoria Police [has recently committed](#) to doing this.

Similarly, the Family Law Court has taken urgent action after reporting a [39% increase](#) in applications relating to parenting orders over the past month.

Both the Family Law Court and Federal Circuit Court will fast-track cases in which there is an increased risk of family violence as a result of COVID-19 social restrictions. This may not guarantee long-term protection to women and children, but it brings perpetrators into view quicker when they are subject to urgent parenting orders during the crisis.

## **How the family violence system is innovating and adapting**

Despite the current challenges, there has been a prompt response from the family violence service sector to the changing environment. For instance, some men's intervention programs are adapting their strategies to reach known perpetrators who otherwise would be unsupported.

The [Men's Family Violence Intervention Centre](#) in Victoria, for instance, has moved all 200 men in its program to online or telephone services.

To replace MBCP group sessions, facilitators contact each man and conduct a 30-minute phone call to discuss topics usually covered in group, as well as other sources of stress (job loss, financial pressure,

isolation at home).

A pilot MBCP for perpetrators with problematic alcohol or other drug use, developed by [TaskForce Community Agency](#), has taken similar actions.

With a new, in-person group meeting unable to start at the moment, men who had been referred to the service are now receiving a combination of phone support and educational materials via group emails. This allows the agency to "check in" with known perpetrators and keep them "in view" until the next face-to-face group can start again.

There are likely many other examples of adapted and innovative practices in Australia, which has been a leading nation in family violence reform over the last five years.

It is essential the momentum of the work advanced nationally to keep perpetrators in view is not lost during the crisis.

There is no road map to achieve this. But it is clear we must prioritize and provide resources for the monitoring, assessment and management of family [violence](#) perpetrators during this time to keep women and children safe.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How do we keep family violence perpetrators 'in view' during the COVID-19 lockdown? (2020, April 28) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-family-violence-perpetrators-view-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.