



**childline**

**Gauteng**

**☎ 08000 55 555**

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## **COVID-19 - REPORT ON HELP LINE DATA**

### **LOCKDOWN PERIOD**

**27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2020 – 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020**

**(35 DAYS OF SERVICE)**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT - NOT FOR PROFIT REGISTRATION NUMBER - 040-010-NPO  
& A REGISTERED CHILD PROTECTION ORGANISATION  
NOT FOR PROFIT COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER – 2015/173593/08  
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*SERVING CHILDREN & FAMILIES 24/7 & 365 DAYS - IMPLEMENTING SECTION 28 OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS (1996)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Childline Gauteng serves vulnerable children and families 24 / 7 and 365 days a year on the Help Line. We hereby report on the work done since the State of Disaster was declared on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 until the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020, including a comparative analysis for the same time period in 2019.

In summary we have engaged with 21 827 calls and 17 919 contacts (some contacts include multiple calls) which is a 67% increase from the same period in 2019, and opened 3 831 cases and counselling sessions (400% increase compared to the same period in 2019) with those whose are experiencing serious challenges requiring assistance in this time of the Lockdown.

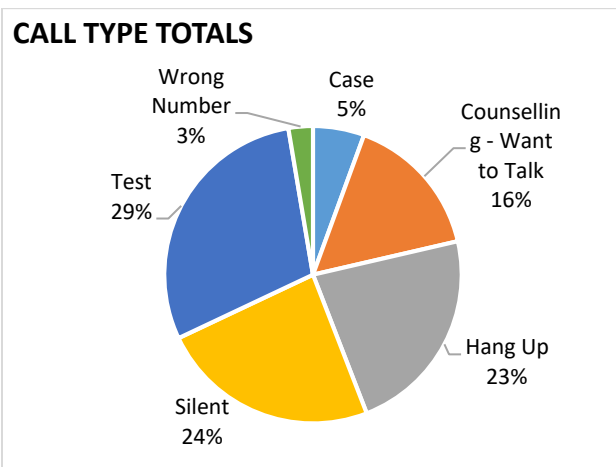
We thank our partners for your support, enabling us to deliver services during the **total period of 35 days of Level 5 of the COVID-19 pandemic** and Lockdown.

## 2. NUMBER AND CATEGORIES OF CALLERS ASSISTED

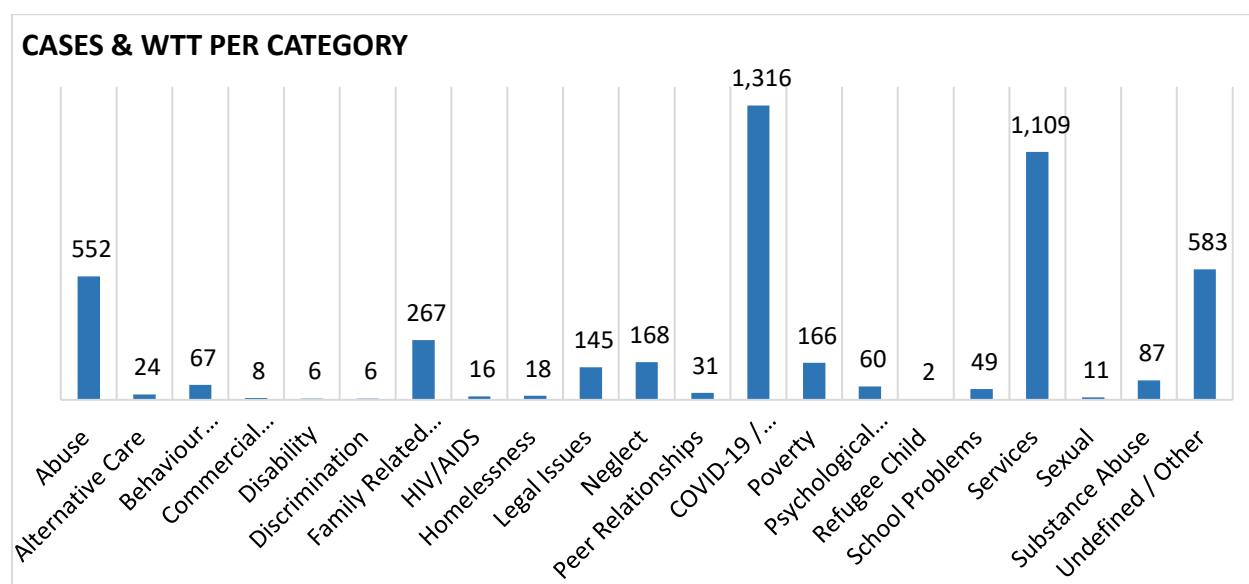
During the period under review, trained and professional counsellors answered 21 827 calls (17 919 contacts) of the 28 697 dialed to the Childline 08000 55555 number in Gauteng. We have done a comparison to the number of calls received for the same period last year 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and note a 67% increase in all categories of calls during the current period. Please see comparative analysis – addendum 1.

These calls for 2020 have been categorized as follows:

- **Cases** - pertaining to serious issues of abuse, neglect, abandonment, poverty, family problems, legal issues, HIV, homelessness, substance abuse, psychological problems and behaviour problems and **telephone counselling** (3 831 and a 400% increase ). Please find report on these cases hereunder:
- **Hang-ups, silent callers and test calls** (13 612) are typically children testing the responses of the counsellors before they get the courage to talk about their problems. We welcome the children who “play” on the lines as we are able to develop a positive relationship with them through listening, being warm and non-judgmental and allowing them to talk about any issue that is on their minds. Children gain mastery over issues by “playing” and they learn to trust the counsellors and feel safe enough to be open about their problems. The experience of a caring adult who is willing to listen and have a conversation with them is often a novel experience. COVID-19 is often top of mind and this enables us to give them basic information on the pandemic and how they can keep themselves safe in this time. **Test calls are a crucial opportunity to build relationships of trust with children, and raise awareness and develop communication skills.**
- **Wrong number** (476): The need and importance of our national Help Line service was made evident in April 2020 by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). ICASA stated that 14 countries in Africa have harmonized the use of the code “116” for Child Helpline Services. This brings the idea of a regionally harmonized code for Child Helpline Services closer to realization. Based on several factors dedicated to the welfare of children and child protection services; **Childline South Africa** have been **elected** as the entity to whom the code shall be assigned for South Africa. Childline South Africa will introduce the “**116**” number nationally from July 2020. This will make our Childline Gauteng Help Line number a **short emergency code that will be easier to read, remember and dial**. A factor that will further increase our call volumes as there will be a collaborative campaign to heighten awareness to the change.



## CATERGORIES REPORTED – 35 DAYS OF LOCKDOWN



Callers appear to experience some relief in moving from Level 5 to 4 and appreciate the reduction of the restrictions allowing exercise and a return to work for some. However, there is still fear and panic regarding the reality of the long term nature of the pandemic and the increased challenges they face.

The highest category of callers pertain to: **COVID-19** at 1 316 (99% increase in health concerns compared to the same period in 2019) and linked to these are 1 109 requests for services and the category “Other” COVID-19 related at 583. The counsellors dispense valuable COVID-19 information; safety and prevention measures; health information such as symptoms, testing clinics, ambulance procurement and hospital services for those that are positive; referrals to the food line which is not able to distribute to all; travel restrictions from other provinces; and available shelters. Community members are also reporting street parties with some not obeying the safety precautions.

We have an updated Resource Manual on COVID-19 with accurate information as well as lists of emergency services for: Institute for Communicable Diseases, DSD, SAPS, reporting lines, Presidential line and helplines available to communities.

**Abuse** is the second highest category (552 cases compared to 212 last year – 61.6% increase) and pertains to physical (213), sexual (82), emotional (237), abandoned children (14), abduction (6) and domestic violence (52) among other categories. These cases necessitate a risk assessment, after which, child protection services from SAPS and DSD are sought. We have facilitated 19 cases where children had to be removed from their families and alternative placements needed to be found.

**Family related problems** (267 cases / 77.5% increase) and **legal issues** (145 cases / 85% increase) pertain to care, parenting plans and custody issues; single mothers struggling with great responsibilities; increase in corporal punishment; sibling rivalry and bullying; allegations of step fathers treating their non-biological children with contempt; mothers who have given birth in this time feeling very vulnerable; separation from parents; and shack fires. This gives rise to many **psychological problems** (60 cases / 85% increase) of depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and parents recalling traumatic childhood experiences which impacts on their parenting. Children in **alternative care** (24 cases / 87.5% increase) i.e. foster care or a children's home dealing with separation issues and feeling abandoned with allegations of emotionally abusive treatment.

**Poverty** related issues (166 cases / 95% increase) resulting in hunger, homelessness (18) and food insecurity and requests for food parcels, requests for the SASSA number and support in terms of warm winter goods. Families without water and electricity is very difficult at this time. Poverty is linked to the **neglect** (168 cases / 54% increase) of children and cases of children being left alone at home with no food; parents going out partying and drinking; children left with grandparents for extended periods of time with no support.

**Behavioural problems** (67 cases / 63% increase) with teens refusing to stay at home; run away children; refusal to do chores or school work; disrespecting care givers; and even physical violence towards family members. **Substance abuse** (87 cases / 78% increase) by teens including drinking, smoking dagga and nyaope (aka: whoonga or wunga) and not obeying the Lockdown regulations to get illegal supplies. Some callers struggle with withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, alcohol and substances.

**School problems** (49 cases / decrease of 6%) and **peer relationships** (31) are less than usual as children are not exposed to schools at this time. Many children are missing school and their friends and are longing to go back. However, there safety is of prime concern and we advocate that schools do not open early.

The counsellors, after doing a **risk assessment**, struggle to find joint solutions with callers to mitigate the tremendous challenges they face. We are relying on DSD and the SA Police Services (SAPS) as some child protection services are on skeleton staff and difficult to access. The counsellors have persisted with follow up calls until they are sure that children at risk have a temporary solution. Please see success stories hereunder.

Our focus is to build family resilience with counselling and information that assists them to deal with the challenges of the times. This enhances their coping skills and emotional intelligence and enables children to play a role in supporting their families.

We are encouraged by community members, who often to step up and assist the children in their communities at this time. We honour our partners in child protection both the SAPS and DSD who assist in finding solutions to children's problems. The African spirit of humanity is fully operational at this time.

### 3. DETAILS OF CASES DEALT WITH ON THE HELP LINE

The **COVID-19 related calls** range from children, families and communities requesting assistance with: Information regarding **safety measures and regulations**; Children out of the province and wanting to return to mom; Child staying with friends before the Lockdown and wanting to return home; **Health related problems** including risks involved in taking children to the clinic for immunisation shots; a mom who gave birth a month ago and has not been able to access vaccinations ; Information regarding testing sites; aunt concerned that children left alone at home after parents tested positive and were admitted to hospital; and, needing debriefing after being tested.

**Abuse related calls** include: a child who cries every day and is being severely **physically abused** by parents; a three year old who was badly beaten, showing multiple lacerations and bruises – father was arrested and child placed at Gugulethu CYCC; young male child physically abusing his mother; siblings being abusive to younger brothers and sisters. **Emotional and verbal abuse:** by a grandmother of a 17 year old troubled teen who has just given birth to a child; a foster child who was returned to biological family and ran back to the foster mother; step father abusive to his step child of 9; parents swearing and shouting at children. **Sexual abuse** – father who is the breadwinner sexually abusing their child; father reported that his child has to share a bed with her new step-father.

**Abandoned children** – left with the employer – placed with a community member; abandoned with family and mother did not return; child was evicted from his home and community member allowed him to stay in a room in her back yard; two year old child left with an old man and a drug abuser

**Abduction** of a young child by his paternal grandfather and his unwillingness to return the child

**Neglected cases** include: children left alone when parents go out drinking; children left alone at home without any food; children dropped off with grandmothers for extended periods of time; mother abandoned children with an unemployed father while she collects the grant.

**Gender Based Violence** wife being evicted from the family home during the lockdown; marital rape and refusal to use a condom so fear of contracting HIV and STI; when opening a case of GBV wife was told to apply for a protection order; and ex-husband very abusive to mother of his child.

**Family problems related to care and parenting plans** include: visiting rights for non-custodial parents; fathers deprived of visiting rights for children; prisoners requesting us to check on their families at home; young man of 21 was arrested and asked us to please phone his family to see if they could help him.

**Homeless people** who need shelter or complaints regarding these shelters; street children; inability to beg at the street corners creating food insecurity; placed in an adult homeless shelter

### 4. MYTHS THE COUNSELLORS ADDRESSED WITH CORRECT INFORMATION

- COVID-19 virus only effects rich white people as they travel a lot

- COVID-19 is spread through the phone or by mosquitoes
- It is safe to travel to grandmother as no one they know is sick
- The rain will wash the virus away
- COVID-19 is not real
- Masks are just for fun
- You cannot open your door to anyone
- Areas with low infection rates are not at risk so should be allowed out of the home
- Children can't see the point of washing their hands so often
- Red cheeks mean you have COVID-19
- Childline has to fetch them as they are tired of staying at home and this violates their rights
- The virus a punishment because they were naughty
- The police arrest a child if they play outside
- You definitely die if you get corona
- Children don't get Corona

## 5. SUCCESS STORIES

- A young orphan, 16 years of age reported being **physically abused** by his older sister, who allegedly gave him Rattex for which he was admitted to hospital. On his discharge the physical abuse continued. The Police confirmed the abuse. We contacted his extended family in Limpopo who agreed to take him into their care post the Lockdown. A caring community member will accommodate this young lad until then.
- A 12 year old girl from Ekurhuleni called to say her mother was bedridden due to HIV Aids related complications and the family had not eaten for days. When she tried to get **food parcels** for herself and two siblings she was unsuccessful. The counsellor managed to get donations of food from Teddy Bear which we were able to deliver and future delivery of bread from a local group assisting in the area.
- After a **fire** destroyed a family shack in Sebokeng a young boy called frantically asking us to help his injured mother. The ambulance was called and took both to hospital whilst the remaining children were taken to their uncle.
- A clinic sister called regarding a mother who was desperate after her husband ejected her from their home after **gender based violence**, insisting that her four month old child, who she was breast feeding, remain with him. The child was starving. The child's aunt took the child to clinic where the counsellor arranged that he was reunited with his mother amidst tears of joy and continued feeding.
- A 27 day old baby was suffering from constipation and serious **health issues**. The mother was turned away from the clinic who were prioritizing COVID-19 cases. We managed to get a Netcare ambulance to admit the child to hospital as the mother fortunately had medical aid.
- A Domestic Worker called to say she saw blood on her two year old charge's underpants and suspected **sexual abuse**. When the mother was told of this, she washed the child. We requested SAPS to investigate the circumstances and they took the toddler to the Thuthuzela Care Centre for a medico legal report. We await the results and placement of the child if found to have been sexually abused.
- A desperate mother called to report her 15 year old girl **child missing**. We requested SAPS to please assist and they took the mom to search the community. She was reported to be seen with local taxi drivers and the search through the Taxi Association continues.

- A young boy of 16, whose mother is a drug addict, reported being **physically abused** by his aunt who threatened to stab him with a broken glass. A kindly community member cared for him until the Moffat View Police Station intervened and placed him at Nkosi's Haven where he will be placed in isolation until his COVID-19 test results are available.
- A young boy arrived at Childline having been turned away from Charlotte Maxeke when he went to collect his **ARVs** as the pharmacy was closed. Follow up revealed that they were on strike and our client was asked to return the next day when the HIV Clinic at the hospital would be able to assist him.
- A mother, originally from Lesotho now living in Johannesburg, lost custody of her children as she was an illegal immigrant and as a domestic worker did not have accommodation for her children. The father who lives in the Free State has been reported for **neglect** and Welkom Child Welfare investigated the matter previously. The boy of 11 reported to his mother that the father beat him until he bled. We have referred the case to Childline Free State as the social worker in Welkom is not available telephonically.
- Two community members came to Childline to report a desperately ill mother and child living in a backyard room. Mother was refusing treatment and they were afraid of being infected. Follow up with SAPS was unsuccessful after a long struggle. EMS was efficient and went out and ensured the mother was **hospitalized** while the child was placed with his father for further observation.

We continue to be inspired by the resilience of our children, the high levels of care from community members and the support we receive from our extended Childline partners in finding solutions for every caller. We honour the counsellors who have been tirelessly serving on the lines for the past 35 days.

## 6. CHALLENGES

The Childline Gauteng telephone system experienced technical problems with some of the MTN calls not coming through. All Cell C and Telkom Mobile calls come through to Childline Gauteng from all provinces. The Vodacom Helpline 116 calls were being transferred to Childline. This has been resolved.

The following issues are of major concern to many of our callers:

- Many family problems are exacerbated at this difficult time and counselling services enable them to deal with these in a more emotionally intelligent manner
- Comparative studies for the same period last year indicate a massive increase in the number of calls and all categories of calls received. Ensuring child safety is a critical service at this stage. We will follow up to ensure all children receive the necessary statutory services once these are fully operational
- Some organisations working on skeleton staff are difficult to access for services to abused and neglected children at this stage. We have relied on community members, DSD and SAPS to assist in the interim until all services are fully operational. The DSD child protection social workers have been very helpful.
- Many children who were separated from their families before the Lockdown are now returning home.
- Mothers of children born at this time are extremely anxious for their babies
- Food security for families and the Gauteng Province food helpline is not fully operational and able to assist currently. This is of grave concern. We have received some food parcels for our Childline Community Based Centres to hand out to their clients and it is a challenge to add this distribution to our overstretched staff

- Troubled children and teenagers are refusing to remain at home and reportedly abusing substances. Their single mothers are finding it difficult to discipline them. This is putting the entire family at risk. Each case is handled according to the specific needs of the caller to find a solution. At times it is sufficient for the counsellor to speak to the child and SAPS have also been called in to give them a “tough love” message
- Many of the Child and Youth Care Centres are full and finding a place for abused children is on a case by case basis
- Economic hardships from many callers is of grave concern both now and in the future
- Continuation of the Lockdown post April 30<sup>th</sup> requires Childline to access greater resources, especially food and warm winter clothes for those in dire need
- Childline funding for the 2020/2021 year is likely to be delayed as our sponsors consider donating to COVID-19
- If SA is unable to “flatten the curve” the orphan rate is likely to increase requiring additional foster care placements

## 7. CONCLUSION

In summary, Childline Gauteng has answered 21 827 calls in the past 35 days, registered 17 919 contacts (67% increase compared to the same period in 2019). This represents a massive increase over the calls received for the same period last year. Please see comparison in addendum 1 hereunder.

We continue to receive great support from community members demonstrating their concern and care for children, often to the point of putting themselves at risk, by taking them into their own homes. We are humbled by their high levels of care.

The SA Police Service and DSD have delivered exceptional services to children and families at this time. We honour them, the medical workers, the Essential Services organisations and the many people who have risen up to serve those that are vulnerable at this time.

We thank our partners for your support enabling Childline to render these critical psycho-social and child protection services. We urge you to continue to support the vital work that Childline does in supporting children, families and communities.

We trust that we will collectively “flatten the curve” and a new South Africa will emerge from the lessons learned during COVID-19 where: the right to equality, dignity and life is assured; a reduction of gross economic inequality; increased services, compassion and support for vulnerable people; and a restoration of pride in our country and our people working together to build a great nation demonstrating our African Humanity.

**Lynne Cawood**  
**Director**  
**4<sup>th</sup> May 2020**



## ADDENDUM 1 - COMPARATIVE HELPLINE STATISTICS REPORT 2019 / 2020

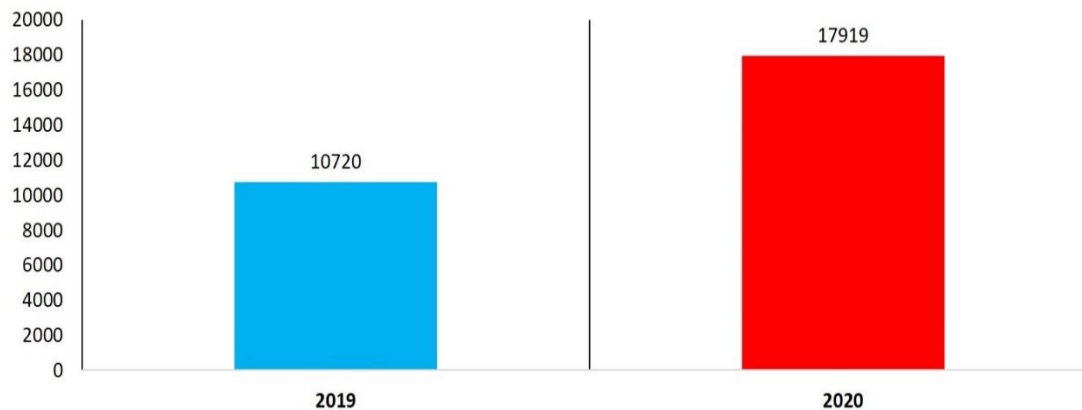
Please see hereunder a comparison on Help Line calls for the same period 27<sup>th</sup> March – 30<sup>th</sup> April for 2019 and 2020 for:

- total calls received on the Help Line;
- cases opened and counselling calls;
- other categories of calls, test, silent and hang ups
- category and sub-category comparison

\*Graphs reflect the number of categorized calls

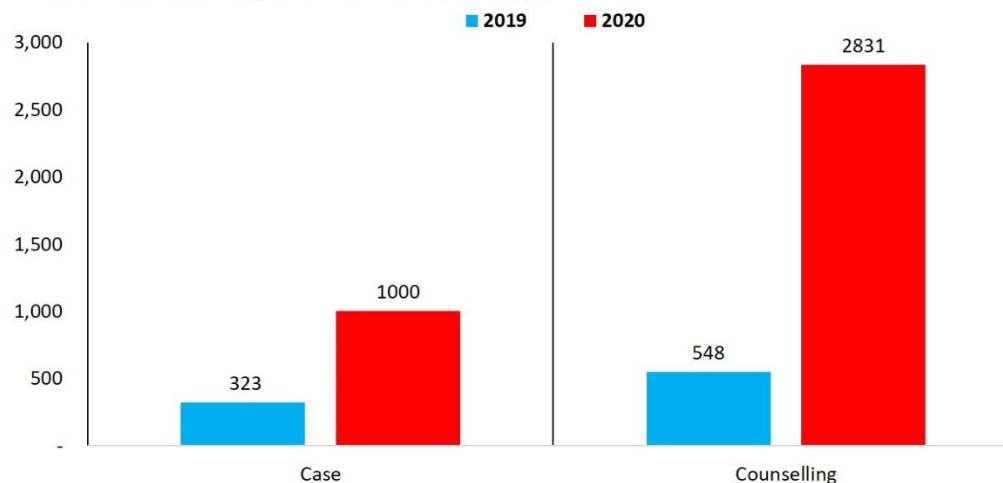
### 1. COMPARISON OF TOTAL CONTACTS - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 AND 27/3 – 30/4 2020

Total calls received: Period 27 March - 30 April



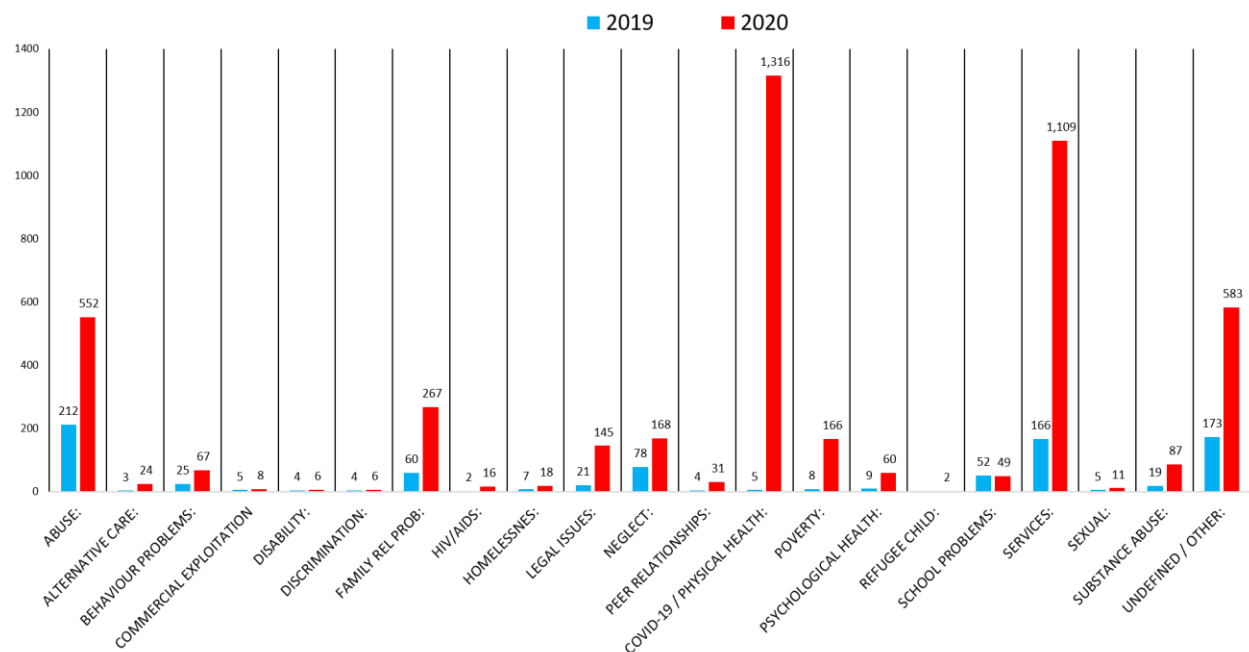
### 2. CASES AND COUNSELLING COMPARISON - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 AND 27/3 – 30/4 2020

Cases and Counselling: Period 27 March - 30 April



### 3. COMPARISON OF ALL CATEGORIES REPORTED - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 AND 27/3 – 30/4 2020

Primary Categories Comparison: Period 27 March - 30 April

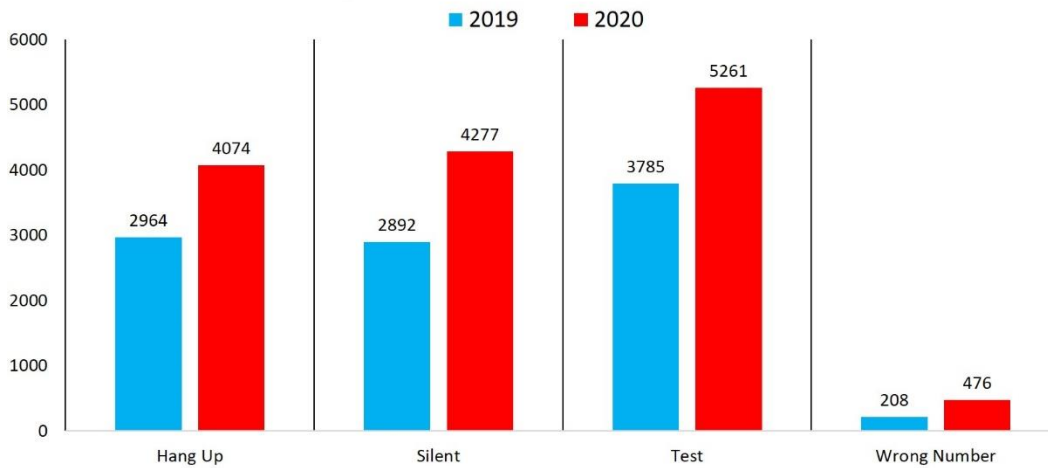


Percentage Increases in all Categories recorded - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 2019 and 27/3 – 30/4 2020

Abuse	61.6%
Alternative Care	87.5%
Behaviour Problem	62.7%
Commercial Exploitation	50.0%
Disability	33.3%
Discrimination	33.3%
Family Related Problems	77.5%
HIV/AIDS	87.5%
Homelessness	61.1%
Legal Issues	85.5%
Neglect	53.6%
Peer Relationships	87.1%
COVID-19 / Physical Health	99.6%
Poverty	95.2%
Psychological Health	85.0%
Refugee Child	100.0%
School Problems	-6.1%
Services	85.0%
Sexual	54.5%
Substance Abuse	78.2%
Undefined / Other	70.3%

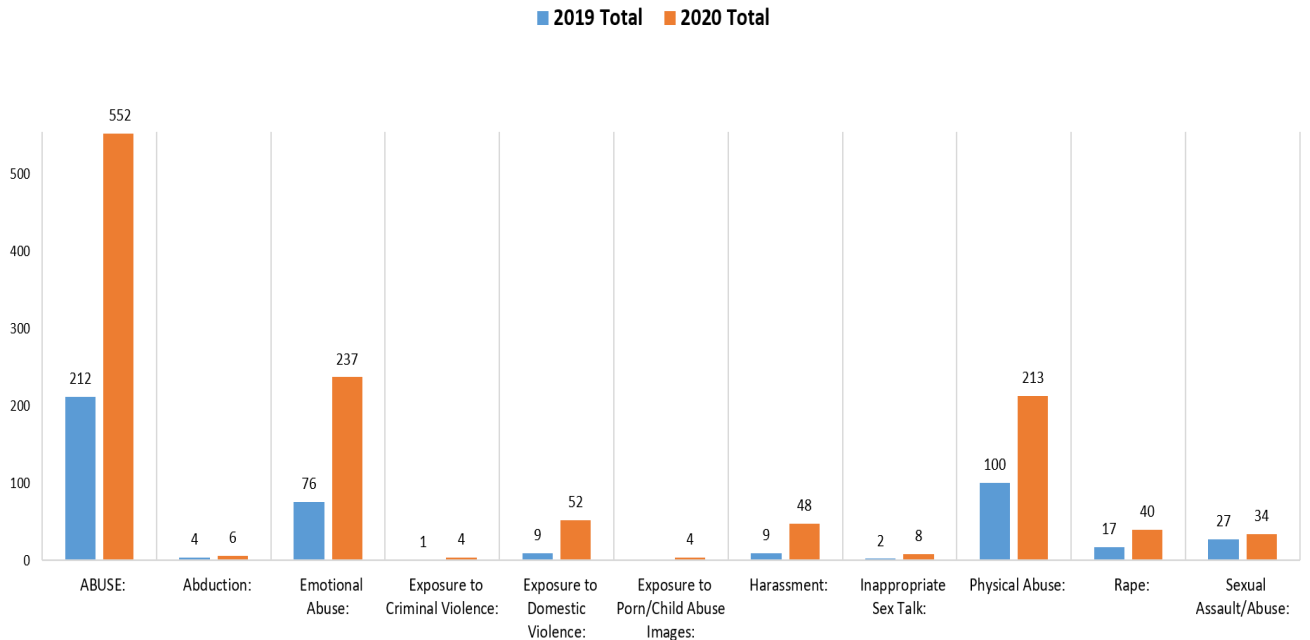
#### 4. COMPARISON - OTHER CALL TYPES - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 and 27/3 – 30/4 2020

Other Calls: Period 27 March - 30 April



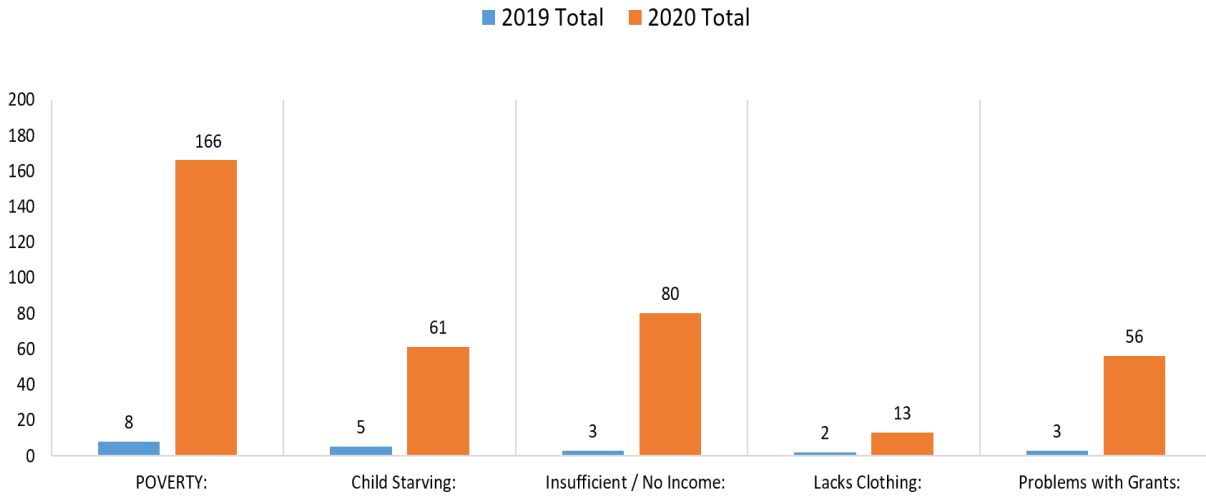
#### 5. ABUSE SUB-CATEGORIES – COMPARISON - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 and 27/3 – 30/4 2020

ABUSE - Category Breakdown



## 6. POVERTY SUB-CATEGORIES – COMPARISON - 27/3 – 30/4 2019 2019 and 27/3 – 30/4 2020

POVERTY - Category Breakdown



## 7. FAMILY RELATED PROBLEMS SUB-CATEGORIES – COMPARISON 27/3 – 30/4 2019 2019 and 27/3 – 30/4 2020

FAMILY RELATED PROBLEMS - Category Breakdown

