



COVID-19 - REPORT ON HELP LINE DATA – LEVEL 4 & 5 LOCKDOWN PERIOD:

- LEVEL 5: 27th MARCH 2020 – 30th APRIL 2020 – 35 DAYS
&
- LEVEL 4: 1st MAY 2020 – 31st MAY 2020 – 31 DAYS

(66 DAYS OF SERVICE)

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& A REGISTERED CHILD PROTECTION ORGANISATION
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***SERVING CHILDREN & FAMILIES 24/7 & 365 DAYS - IMPLEMENTING SECTION 28 OF THE
BILL OF RIGHTS (1996)***

1. INTRODUCTION – HELP LINE SERVICES

Childline Gauteng serves vulnerable children and families 24 / 7 and 365 days a year. We hereby report on the work done since the declaration of the National State of Disaster, 27th March 2020 – 31st May 2020.

In summary we have engaged with 17 919 contacts in Level 5 and 17 503 in Level 4, a total of **35 422**. We had 8 591 cases and/or counselling sessions with those whose are experiencing serious challenges requiring assistance in this time of the Lockdown.

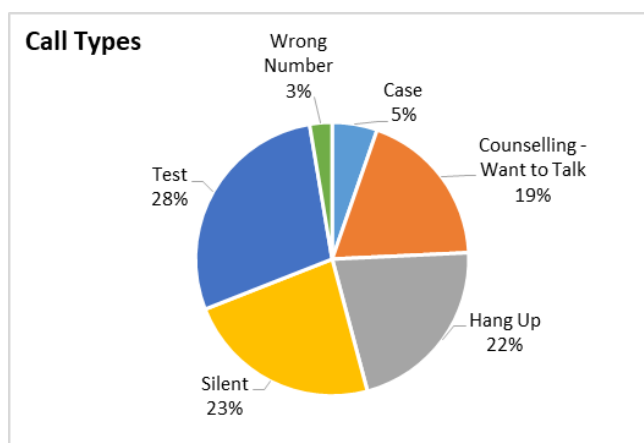
The importance of the national Help Line service was made evident in April 2020 by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) granting Childline SA the “116” internationally recognized number for children and families.

14 countries in Africa have harmonized the use of the code “116” for Child Helpline Services. Childline South Africa will introduce the “**116**” number nationally from July 2020. This will be easier to read, remember and dial. The national marketing campaign will further increase our call volumes.

We thank our partners for your support, enabling us to deliver services during the total period of 66 days of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

2. NUMBER AND CATEGORIES OF CALLERS ASSISTED

During the period under review, trained and professional counsellors captured 35 422 contacts on our data system of calls dialed to the Childline 08000 55555 number in Gauteng.



These calls for the period have been categorized as follows:

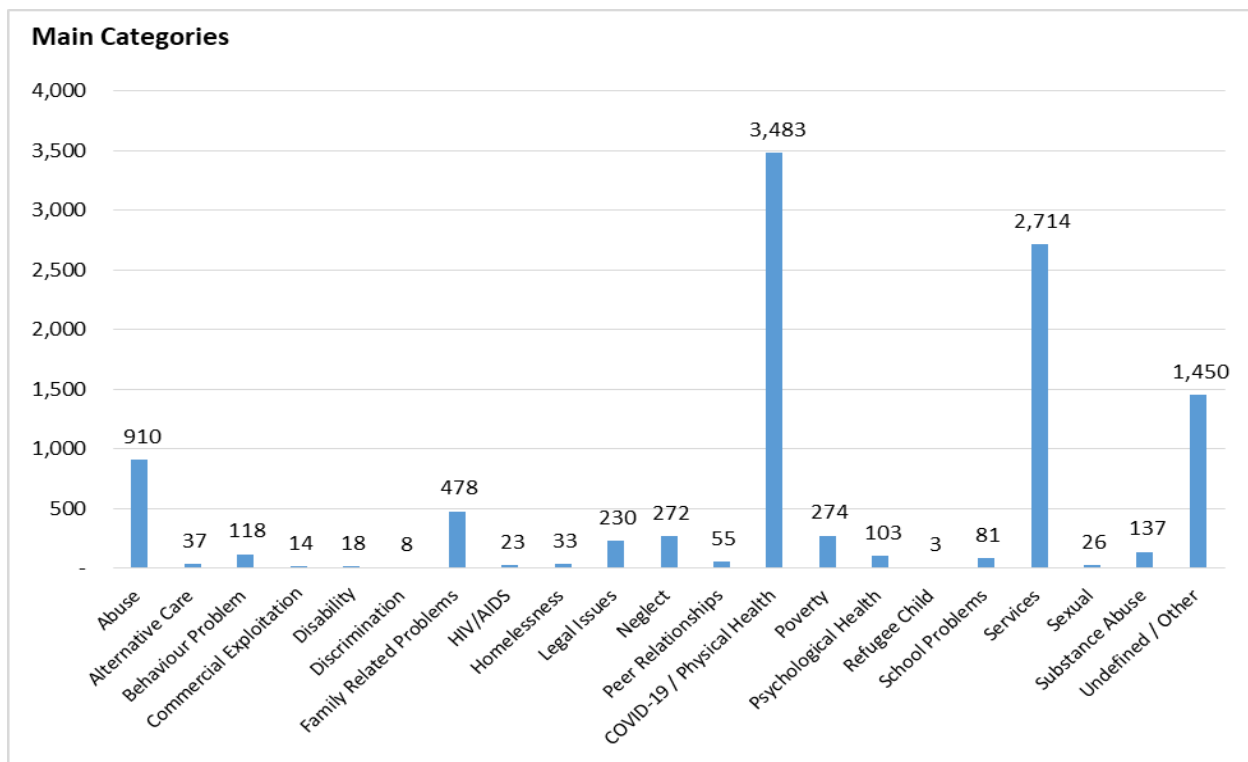
- **1 890 Cases and 6 701 telephone counselling clients** (a total of 8 591) pertaining to issues of abuse, neglect, abandonment, poverty, family problems, legal issues, HIV, homelessness, substance abuse, psychological problems and behaviour problems Please find report on these cases hereunder:
- **Hang-ups, silent, wrong number and test calls** (26 831) 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.

3. CATEGORIES OF COUNSELLING & CASES

Callers are greatly relieved to move from Levels 5 & 4 to Level 3. There is an appreciation in the reduction of restrictions and children are looking forward to going back to school. However, there is still fear and panic about the future, concerns regarding alcohol abuse, the reality of the long term nature of the pandemic and the increased challenges they face.

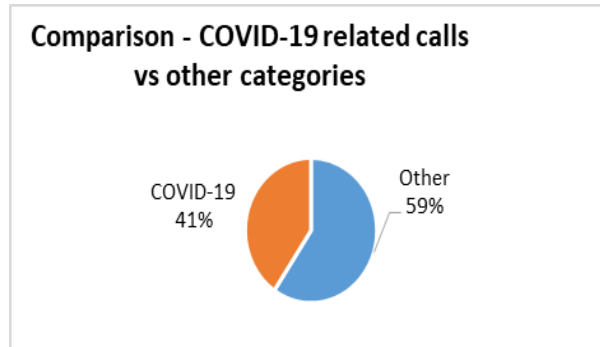
We have seen a slight decrease in Level 4 of all categories of counselling / cases, except for COVID-19 related calls (3 483), appreciation for the Childline services (906) and “Other” (1 451). Counsellors have also noted that the degree of violence was less serious than usual which we ascribe to the reduction in alcohol abuse.



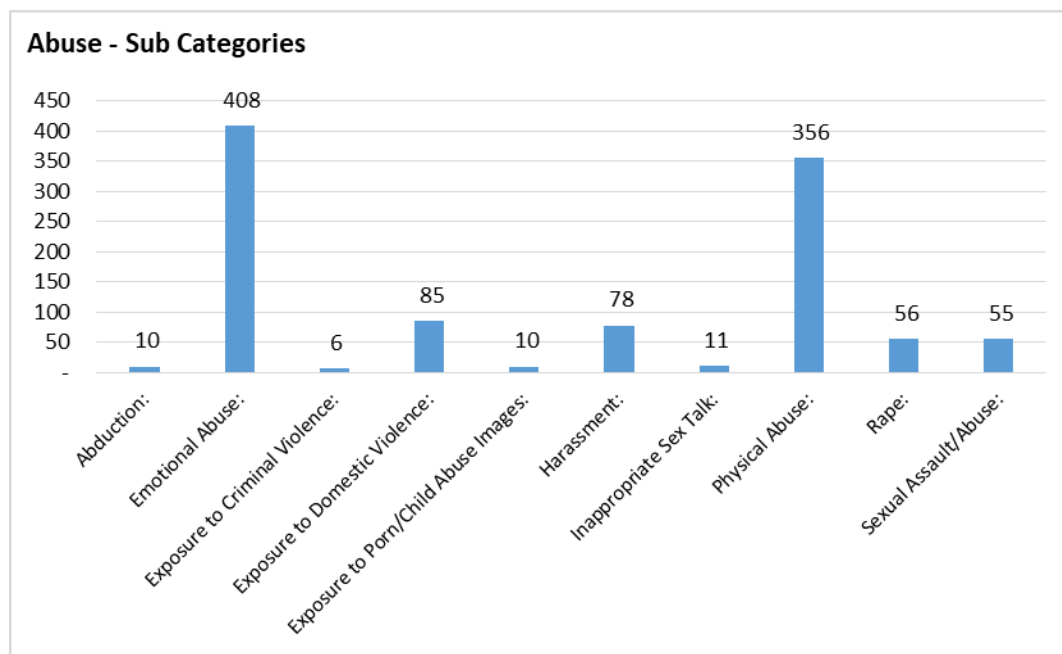
The highest category of callers pertain to: **COVID-19** at 3 483. In addition, requests for services (2 714) and “Other” (1 450) include COVID-19 related information. We have an updated Resource Manual on COVID-19 with accurate information as well as lists of emergency services for: Institute for Communicable Diseases, DSD, SAPS, reporting lines, Presidential line and helplines available to communities.

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.

COVID-19 cases include: prisoners who have no protective gear; SAPS beating community members for not adhering to regulations; and community members reporting street parties and flouting the safety precautions.

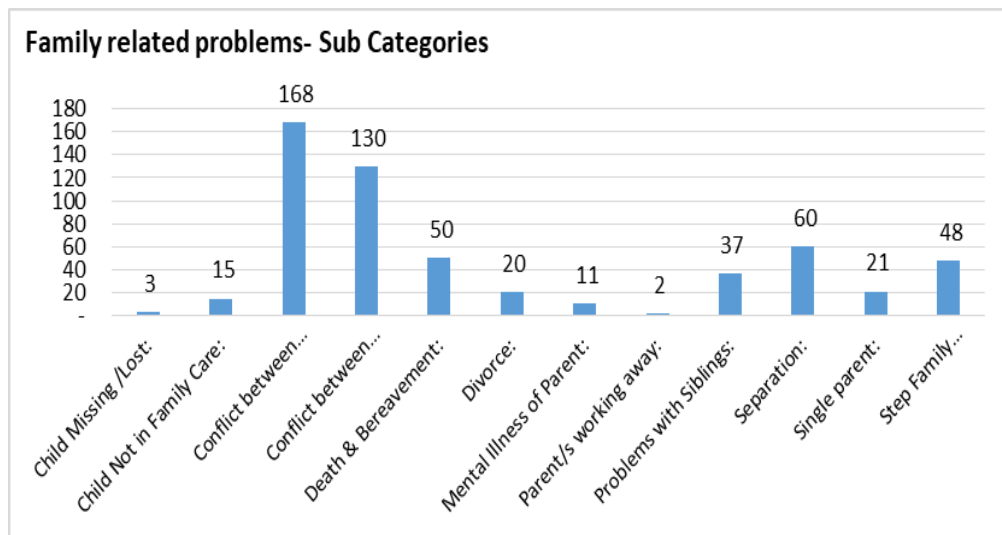


Abuse is the second highest category (910) cases and pertains to physical (356), sexual (132), emotional (408), abduction (10) and domestic violence (85) among other categories. These cases necessitate a risk assessment, after which, child protection services from SAPS and DSD are sought. Abuse cases include: both mothers and fathers being violent with their children; sibling aggression; financial abuse; swearing; and even children being violent towards their mothers.



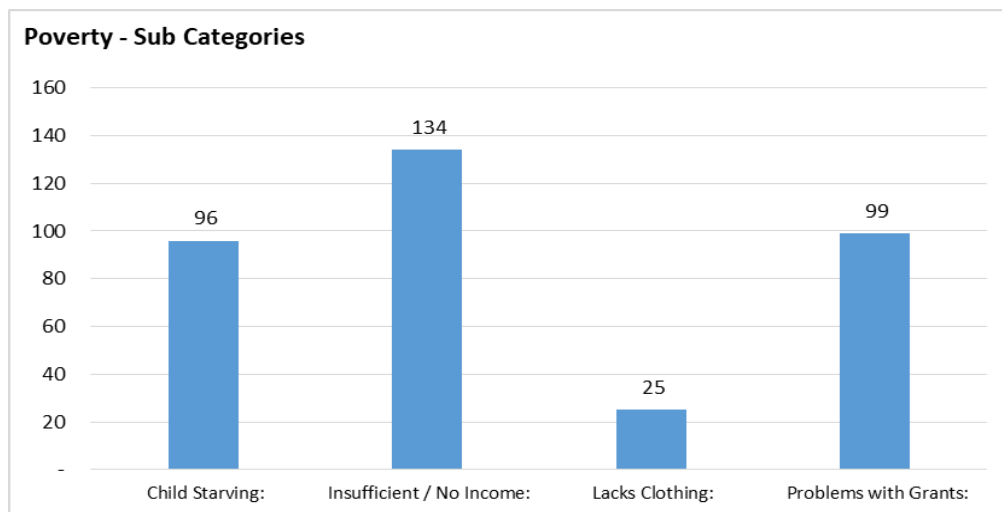
Family related problems (487 cases) and **legal issues** (230 cases) pertain to: family aggression; care, parenting plans and custody issues; single mothers struggling with great responsibilities; increase in corporal punishment; sibling rivalry and bullying; allegations of step fathers treating their non-biological children with contempt; mothers who have given birth in this time feeling very vulnerable; separation from parents; and home fires. This gives rise to many **psychological problems** (104 cases) of depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and parents recalling traumatic childhood experiences which impacts on their parenting.

Children in **alternative care** (37 cases) i.e. foster children or those in a children's home dealing with separation issues and feeling abandoned with allegations of emotionally abusive treatment. Cases of **gender based violence** include: SAPS trying to evict a mother after partner laid inaccurate domestic violence charges; and, three male abusers being arrested.

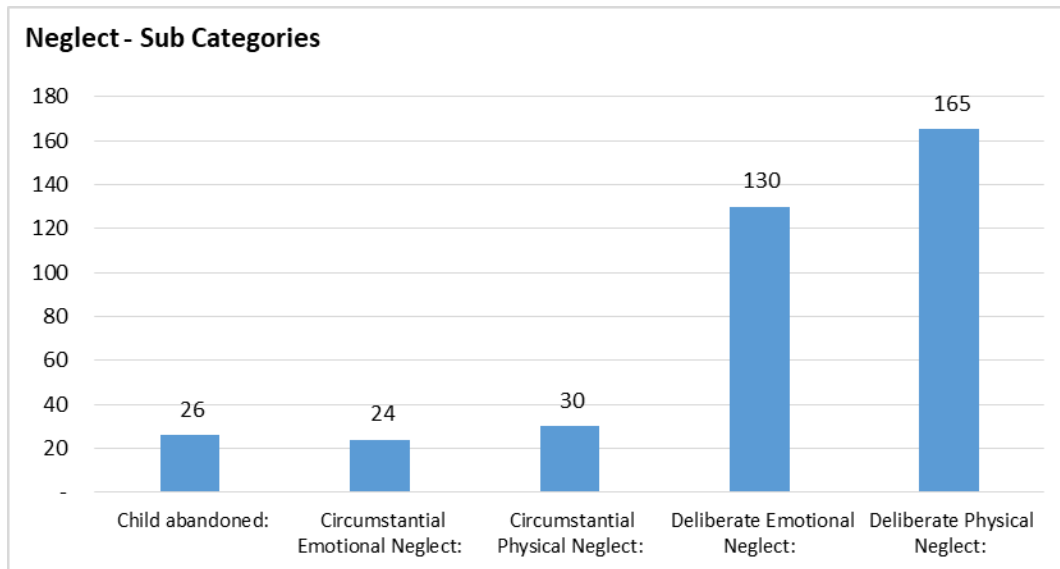


Poverty related issues (274 cases) resulting in hunger, homelessness, lack of winter clothes and food insecurity. We have been able to source food parcels from the HCI Foundation, TSU Chi Foundation and African Children's Feeding Scheme which we distributed to the most desperate of families.

Cases pertaining to poverty include: concerns regarding aggression by loan sharks demanding repayment; request for assistance in getting an orphan an ID whilst Home Affairs is closed; abuse of the Child Support Grant by parents who have left children with family members; delay in the days grants are paid; and, difficulty in accessing the unemployment grant of R350.



Poverty is linked to the **neglect of children** (272 cases) - being left alone at home with no food; parents going out partying and drinking; children left with a 77 year old grandparent who is ill, for extended periods of time, with no support.



Behavioural problems (118 cases) with teens refusing to stay at home; run away children; refusal to do chores or school work; disrespecting care givers; and even child physical violence towards family members. **Substance abuse** (137 cases) by teens including drinking, smoking dagga and nyaope (aka: whoonga or wunga) and not obeying the Lockdown regulations to get illegal supplies. Parents abusing alcohol is a serious problem as well. Some callers struggle with withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, alcohol and substances. There have been a number of successful cases where counsellors have spoken to disobedient youth where they apologized and promised to behave better.

School problems (81) and **peer relationships** (55) 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, their 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 safe 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 honour our partners in child protection: community members, who often step up and assist the children in need; the health workers, SAPS and DSD who assist in finding solutions to children's problems. The African spirit of humanity is fully operational at this time.

4. MYTHS THE COUNSELLORS ADDRESSED WITH CORRECT INFORMATION

- Children thinking there is a cure
- Level 3 means that the pandemic is over
- Child asking the counsellor to wash hands with him and children can't see the point of washing their hands so often
- 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 as no one knows that they are sick
- The rain will wash the virus away

- COVID-19 is not real as they don't know anyone who has passed away
- 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
- 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 is a punishment because they were naughty
- The police will arrest a child if they play outside
- You will definitely die if you get COVID-19
- Children don't get COVID-19

5. SUCCESS STORIES

- We supported the Inter-faith Day of Prayer called by President Ramaphosa and many callers phoned to pray for the children and families in South Africa, uplifting our counsellors
- An angry young boy called to swear at the counsellor and when she asked if she could pray for him he apologized and spoke to her about his problems
- Food parcels have been distributed to hungry clients
- The sister of a young boy who was bullying him was persuaded to stop this behaviour
- Three cases of Gender Based Violence resulted in the abusers being arrested. Cases of Gender based violence where women were not willing to lay charges were dealt with by the counsellors who threatened that we would lay charges if their behaviour persisted, resulted in apologies to their partners
- Children wanting to go to school were referred to the SABC educational channels
- A young boy abusing substances was successfully referred to a church rehabilitation

We are heartened by the many children who phone to: thank the counsellors; say a prayer or sing a song; asking the counsellors to please take every precaution to prevent COVID-19; and wish the Childline mothers a Happy Mother's Day. 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 66 days of lockdown.

6. CHALLENGES

Childline Gauteng currently receives all the national Cell C and Telkom Mobile calls until the software can be installed to distribute to the province of the caller.

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

- There has been an increase in the severity of the cases in Level 3, related to alcohol abuse;
- There is an increase in the levels of fear in many callers due to the high daily infection rates
- Economic hardships from many callers is of grave concern both now and in the future. 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 follow up to ensure all children receive the necessary statutory services once these are fully operational. Some organisations 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. Many of the Child and Youth Care Centres are full and finding a place for abused children is on a case by case basis

- 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 everyone. This is of grave concern. We have limited access to food for 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 are 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
- We require access to 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 had 35 422 contacts in the past 66 days, registering 8 591 cases. This is a massive increase over the calls received for the same period last year.

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

3rd June 2020