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## **COVID-19 - REPORT ON HELP LINE DATA – LEVEL 5, 4, 3 & 2 LOCKDOWN PERIOD:**

**LEVEL 5: 27<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2020 – 35 DAYS**  
**LEVEL 4: 1<sup>st</sup> MAY 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> MAY 2020 – 31 DAYS**  
**LEVEL 3: 1<sup>st</sup> JUNE – 18<sup>st</sup> AUGUST 2020 – 79 DAYS**  
**LEVEL 2: 19<sup>th</sup> AUGUST – 20<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER – 32 DAYS**

**(177 DAYS OF AROUND THE CLOCK SERVICE)**

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

## 1. INTRODUCTION – 24/7 TOLL FREE - HELP LINE SERVICES (08000 55555)

Childline Gauteng serves vulnerable children and families 24 / 7 and 365 days a year on our Help Line and Sunlight Safe House and our Community Based Counselling Centres provide psycho-social and community support.

Clients express a great deal of relief at the ushering in of Level 1 and the reduction of daily infection rates. However, with the second wave likely to peak in December 2020, we need to remind our callers to remain vigilant.

In summary we have engaged with 95 618 callers in the period under review. We opened 33 360 cases and counselling sessions with those facing challenges and requiring our assistance. COVID-19 remains the main priority for 19 510 callers. The structural inequality in our country results in the impact on vulnerable families being extreme with a great need for psycho-social and economic support, to deal with the exacerbation of these problems.

The Help Line service has been awarded the short code, 116 internationally recognized number for children and families by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). This 116 number can now be dialed (as well as 08000 55555 until the end of the year) to access our services. 116 will be easier to read, remember and dial. The national marketing campaign will further increase our call volumes.

As we collectively engage to assist the children of our nation, to emerge from the pandemic physically, mentally and emotionally stable; ensuring their positive growth for a sustainable future, Childline is committed to provide hope, counselling, access to protection and support services and information to deliver their basic needs. Together we can ensure a positive outcome for our youth.

We thank you for your support of children and hereby report on our analysis of child and family issues, as reported to Childline, since the declaration of the National State of Disaster, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

## 2. NUMBER AND CATEGORIES OF CALLERS ASSISTED

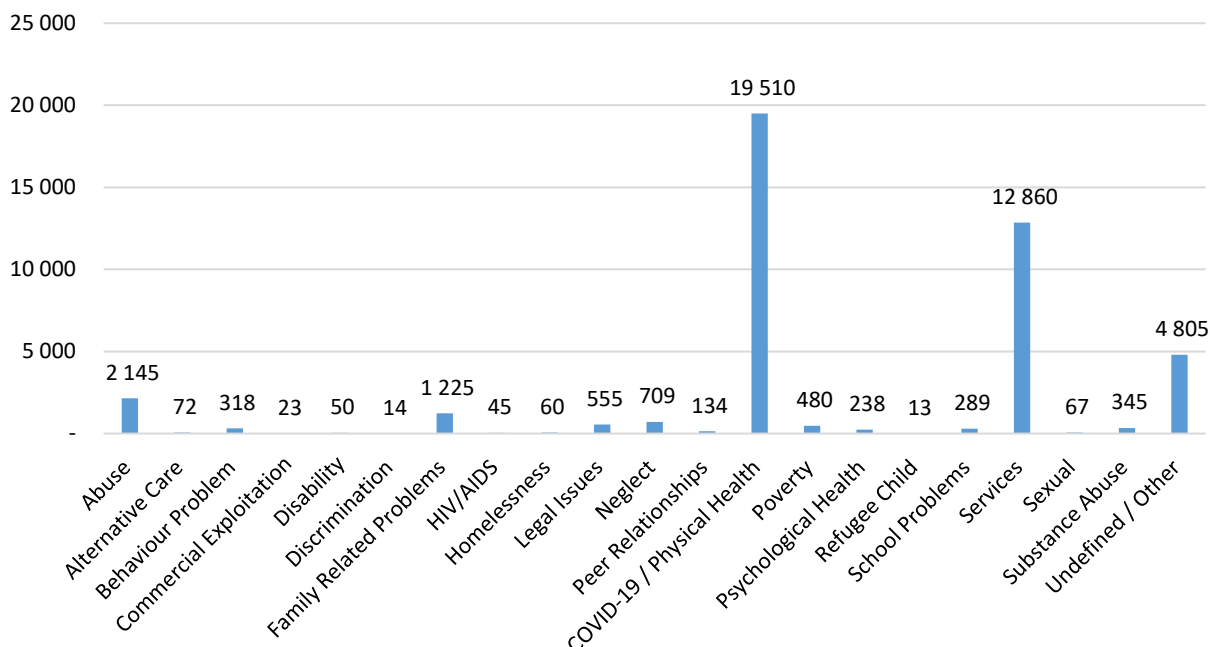
During the period under review, trained and professional counsellors captured 95 618 contacts on our data system of calls dialed to the Childline 08000 55555 number in Gauteng, as follows:

- 33 360 cases and counselling sessions were opened. 6 012 **Cases** and 27 348 **telephone counselling clients** pertaining to issues of: COVID-19, health and HIV; physical, sexual and emotional abuse; neglect / poverty; abandonment; family problems and legal issues; homelessness; substance abuse; psychological and behaviour problems.
- 38 575 callers were silent or hung up - being unwilling or not ready to discuss their concerns.
- 20 203 callers engaged in testing the counsellor responses which aligns with international research indicating children will phone up to 20 times before they are brave enough to talk. We welcome this opportunity to promote positive relations with young people.

In summary, the highest categories of callers pertained to: COVID-19 (19 513) and services (12 860) which are mostly COVID related; all forms of abuse (2 145); family (1 225) and legal problems (555); neglect (709) and poverty (480); substance abuse (345); children and parents are stressed about the potential infection rate due to the opening up of communities, work places and schools.

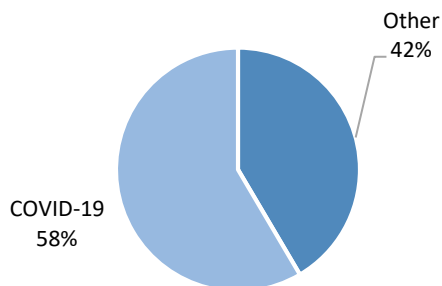
There is a noticeable increase in calls pertaining to alcohol abuse related cases and although the percentage of reports of abuse remain the same, the extent of violence has increased.

## Main Categories



## COVID-19 Related Cases

### Comparison - COVID-19 related calls vs other categories



Callers demonstrate great anxiety and stress, with an increase in COVID-19 related cases (19 513), linked to requests for services at 12 860, mostly related to the pandemic, i.e. a total of 32 373 clients.

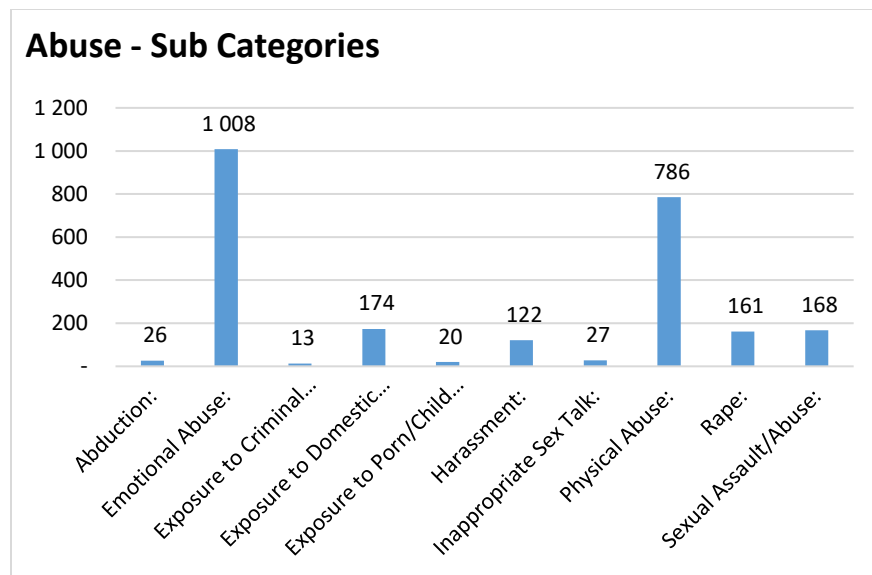
We continually update the Childline Resource Manual on COVID-19 with accurate information as well as lists of emergency services for: Institute for Communicable Diseases, DSD, SAPS, DoH reporting lines, CYCC capacity for emergency placement of children, mental and health facilities, Presidential line and services available to communities.

The counsellors dispense valuable COVID-19 information; safety and prevention measures; health information such as symptoms, testing and quarantine sites, ambulance procurement and hospital services for those that are positive; referrals to the food line which is not able to distribute to all; donations of food parcels; travel regulations; and available CYCCs and GBV shelters.

COVID-19 cases include: community members phoning to ask how they can assist children they see playing in the streets without masks; economic stress and hunger as a result of job losses; persons seeking urgent medical support; children or partners refusing to say home posing a risk to the family. The pandemic exacerbates all other child and family problems, such as abuse, psychological issues, poverty and neglect, as well as GBV.

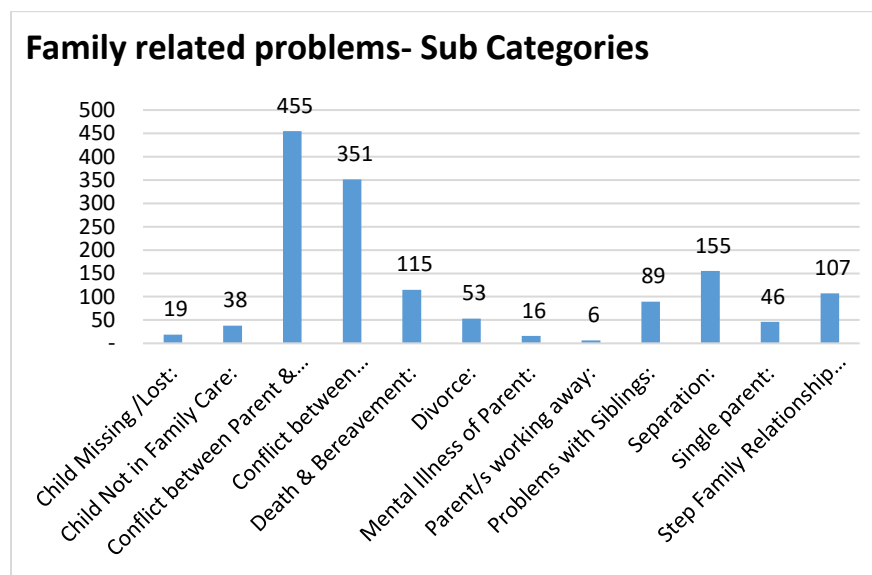
### Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse

Abuse is the second highest category at 2 145 cases and pertains to: physical abuse (786); sexual violence – rape, assault, verbal and exposure to porn (498), emotional (1 008), abduction (26) and domestic violence (174). Clients are supported and risk assessment indicates the level of danger, after which, SAPS or child protection services from DSD are sought.



### Family Related Problems

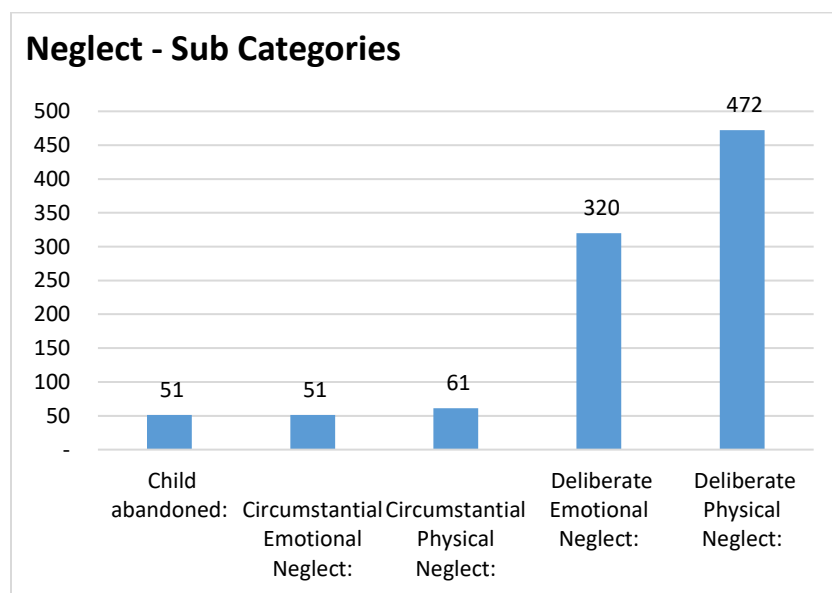
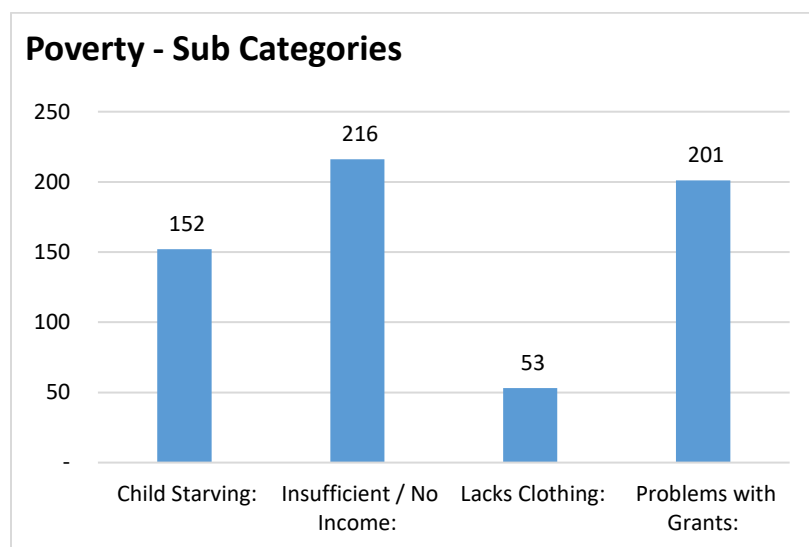
A total of 1 225 **family problems** and 555 related **legal issues**, pertaining to: family aggression; care, parenting plans and custody issues; single mothers struggling with great responsibilities; fathers feeling alienated; increase in corporal punishment; sibling rivalry and bullying; allegations 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 199 **psychological problems** of depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and parents recalling traumatic childhood experiences which impacts on their parenting.



### Poverty Related Concerns

**Poverty** related issues (480) cases resulting in hunger, homelessness, lack of winter clothes and food insecurity. This is aligned to cases of **neglect** at 709. We have been able to source food parcels from the HCI Foundation, Tzu Chi Foundation, Afrika Tikkun and African Children's Feeding Scheme which we distributed to the most desperate of families.

Cases pertaining to neglect and poverty include: toddlers being left alone at home with no care giver; parents out partying; children left with grandparents for extended periods of time, with no support. Concerns regarding aggression by loan sharks; request for assistance in getting IDs from Home Affairs and grants; abuse of the Child Support Grant by parents; delay in grant payments; and, difficulty in accessing the unemployment grant.



### Children with Behavioural Problems

318 children with **behavioural problems**, placing additional pressure on already overwhelmed families is gravely concerning. This behaviour is often a result of early childhood trauma and reflects in: 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** (345) cases including drinking,

smoking dagga and **nyaope**. There have been a number of successful cases where counsellors have spoken to disobedient youth where they apologized and promised to behave better. Counselling to address early emotional trauma and tough love is helpful.

### School Related Concerns

Children are delighted to have returned to school and few problems are reported: **school problems** (289) and **peer relationships** (134) are less than usual mostly related to concerns about passing the academic year. Many children are so appreciative of the feeding schemes and seeing their friends again.

**The Childline services** provide an individualized assessment and risk analysis with all callers. This allows for reflection on the best plan of action for each client based on standard operating procedures for all issues. Solutions are devised with callers to mitigate the tremendous challenges they face. We rely 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 Point 5 - success stories.

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.

## 3. TRENDS

One of the themes that has come through has been of Deliberate Neglect linked to substance abuse, the period under review has seen parents/caregivers going out drinking and not coming back for days. An example is of a client who called the Helpline because the children aged 2 and 4 were seen crying peeking out their window. When the neighbours went to investigate they discovered that the children had been left alone again while their mother went drinking. There was also a mother who left a 7 year old in charge of her younger siblings while she went drinking.

Rape and Sexual Assault by perpetrators known to the victim or actually living in the same house is more common. There was a case of a 9 year old girl who was raped by her uncle with whom she was living with. The counsellor intervened and the case was referred to SAPS.

Returning to school has been a delight to most children, who are happy to see their friends and to have access to the school feeding scheme. However, parents and "gogos" are worried about the increased risk of infection.

Levels of emotional pain and family problems are exacerbated by generalised fear resulting from COVID-19 requiring greater care and support of callers, along with information to assist in overcoming the difficulties.

## 4. MYTHS THE COUNSELLORS ADDRESSED WITH CORRECT INFORMATION

- Children believing that the corona crisis is over
- Suggesting various cures
- 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
- People who test positive will die

- 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
- Areas with low infection rates are not at risk
- 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
- Children don't get COVID-19

## 5. SUCCESS STORIES

Among the very many stories with a happy ending, we are privileged to share a few with you:

- The counsellor received a call from a client reporting that her grandson is being physically abused by his drug addicted father and this has been going on for a long time. The child was staying with his drug addicted mother on the streets and last year she left the child with his father. In 2019 the child tried to commit suicide by electrocuting himself and was admitted to hospital for 3 months. The father beat him and told him to leave his house, locking him outside with his clothes, saying he didn't want to raise him anymore. The child then went to stay at a neighbour's house. The counsellor called 10111 and a case of child abuse was opened. The police picked up the child along with the father and a family member. The family saw a Social Worker based at the police station and it was decided that the child be placed with his grandmother. The counsellor then called Childline Sebokeng to book therapy for the child.
- A case of sexual assault was received from Tshepisong Clinic by one of the counsellors. According to the reporter who is a medical nurse the 11 year old child had been raped by a group of boys and her sickly grandmother who has been the primary care-giver was unable to report the case at the police station. The grandmother was also afraid to report the case as the boys were possibly going to retaliate and harm her. According to the nurse she has tried to report the case to numerous organisations without success. The counsellor subsequently reported the case to FCS Kagiso for investigation and to Discovery Child and Family Welfare who attended to the case immediately. The child has been seen by a medical doctor who confirmed that she has a sexually transmitted infection. We are awaiting the statutory outcome as a home visit was conducted.
- The case of the child came through via the Childline SA chat line. The young person is physically and emotionally abused by his parents. This has allegedly been going on for a long time. As a result the child has speaking about taking his life as he has not been getting the necessary help. The counselor managed to calm him down, however, his situation has not improved and his parents continuously hit him with a belt. His parents are strict with regards to chores and his school work, and he gets beaten with a belt. They also emotionally abuse him by calling him a disappointment and make him feel useless. The counselor has referred the young person to SADAG for therapy and he has been receiving virtual therapy. He has also started speaking to the Social Worker at his school especially when he feels suicidal. The school program Social Workers are currently investigating his home circumstances to determine the best outcome. The young person continues to call our counselors during the night when he is suicidal and experiencing discomforting feelings. This has been a great support system knowing that he can speak to us at anytime.
- A distraught mom called indicating that the father of her five year old refused to return the child after visiting him for over a month. Mom subsequently found out that her child had been taken

by the father's girlfriend to another province without her consent. The SAPS intervened opening a case of abduction after which the father returned the child.

- A 16 year old girl phoned in tears as her mother leaves her to look after her siblings every weekend to party with her boyfriends. The mom was confronted by the counsellor and she too was very emotional, indicating that she was dependent on her boyfriend for finances to feed her children. The family were referred to the Childline Community office in Winterveld for counselling, parenting skills training and consideration of alternative means of securing an income.
- A young mother of a 3 month old infant called in tears as she was being emotionally and physically rejected (verbal abuse, being pushed around and told she is a burden as she cannot contribute to the family income). She unsuccessfully asked for support from the father of her child and is currently on the streets. She was referred to the Childline KZN Social Worker who is arranging to place her and the baby in a shelter.
- A teacher called for assistance for a 10 year old pupil who was the victim of physical abuse by her father who is also very violent to his wife who is terrified of him. The aunt was called to provide support and the matter was reported to the Germiston Child Protection Unit for further intervention.

We are heartened by the many children and parents who phone to: thank the counsellors; say a prayer; sing a song; wish our counsellors well and tell us to prevent COVID-19. 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 since the beginning of Lockdown, day and night.

## 6. CHALLENGES

Childline has been able to offer services for the entire period of Lockdown which has been almost six months. Whilst we are privileged to be able to assist the impact on the counsellors is that they are overwhelmed with the extent of suffering in our communities.

Some of our staff tested positive for COVID-19 and we grateful to be able to transfer the Help Line calls to Childline KZN for a two days, while we tested all counsellors and sanitized the offices.

We currently receive all the national Cell C, Vodacom and Telkom Mobile calls until they install the software to distribute to the province of the caller.

Ensuring staff safety at this time has been a major challenge. We have provided staff transport, changed the roster to ensure greater safety, provided periods of isolation for those exposed, and all PPE required.

Distributing donated food to those in dire straits has been an additional service we have offered to approximately 500 of our clients.

The following issues are of major concern to many of our callers, with levels and extent of violence increasing compared to levels 5, 4, 3 and 2:

- Fear, stress and anxiety due to the high infection and death rates requires our counsellors to contain the high levels of emotion and assist in making positive choices regarding the way forward
- GBV and child abuse tends to be perpetrated by persons known to them, often within the family
- Economic hardships culminating in hunger is devastating and ensuring access to food parcels or vouchers is critical



- 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 as per the Child Care Act. We have relied on community members, DSD and SAPS to assist. Many of the GBV shelters and Child and Youth Care Centres are full and finding a place for mothers and abused children is always a challenge
- 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

## 7. CONCLUSION

Childline Gauteng is extremely grateful to our partners who have assisted us to extend our capacity on the Help Line, enabling us to provide these vital services.

In summary, Childline Gauteng has had 95 618 contacts in the period under review, registering 33 360 cases and counselling engagements. This is a massive increase compared to the calls received for the same period last year.

Vulnerable families bear the brunt of the pandemic and structural inequality in our country, with increased psycho-social and economic problems of: family functioning undermined by emotional abuse and violence; neglect, hunger and poverty; great anxiety regarding health issues; children behaving inappropriately; and difficulty in accessing support services at this critical time.

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 spirit of African Humanity.

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. Despite the many challenges that we know you are facing in terms of the difficult economic climate and troubling COVID-19 statics.

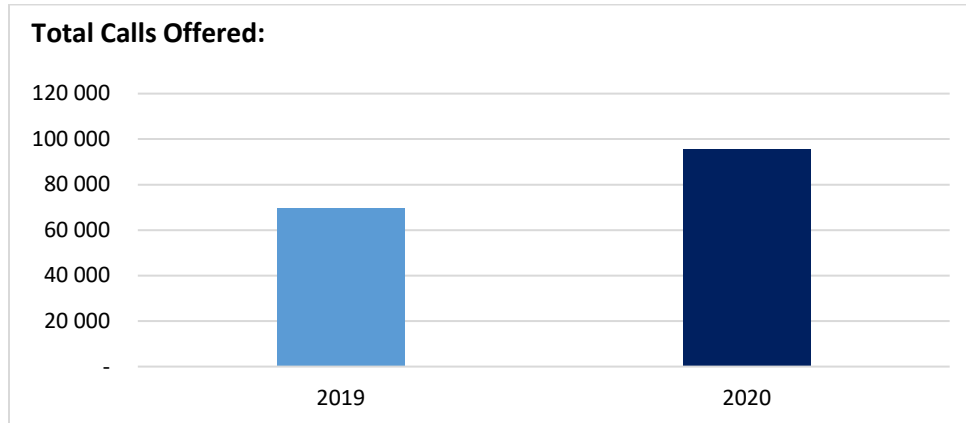
We trust that we will collectively overcome this traumatic time and a new South Africa will emerge from the lessons learned during COVID-19 where: compassion; equality, dignity and life is assured; a reduction of gross economic inequality; increased services and support for vulnerable people; and a restoration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

**Lynne Cawood**  
**Director**  
**6<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

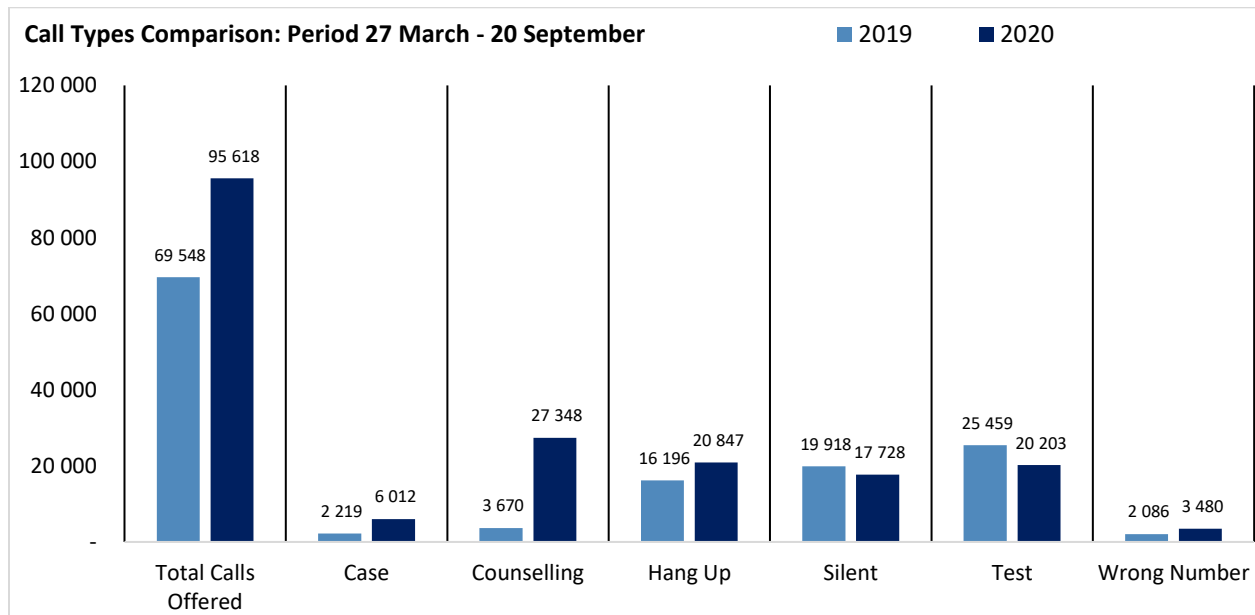
## CHILDLINE GAUTENG

### COMPARATIVE HELPLINE STATISTICS REPORT 2019 / 2020 Period: 27/03/2019 – 20/09/2019 compared to 27/03/2020 – 20/09/2020

#### 1. TOTAL CALLS RECEIVED



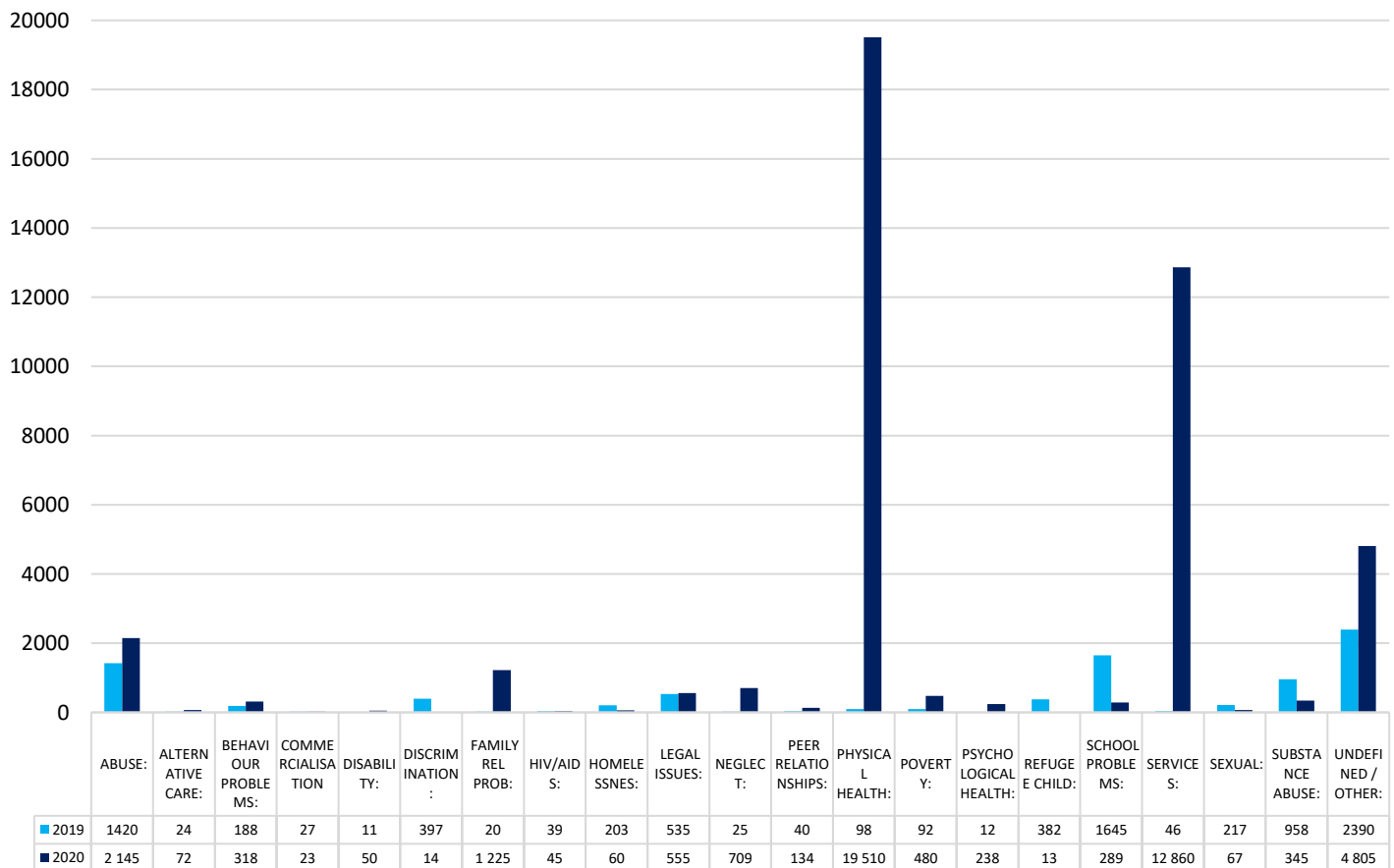
	2019	2020	%
Case	2,219	6,012	71%
Counselling - Want to Talk	3,670	27,348	645%
Hang Up	16,196	20,847	29%
Silent	19,918	17,728	-11%
Test	25,459	20,203	-21%
Wrong Number	2,086	3,480	67%
Grand Total	69,548	95,618	37%



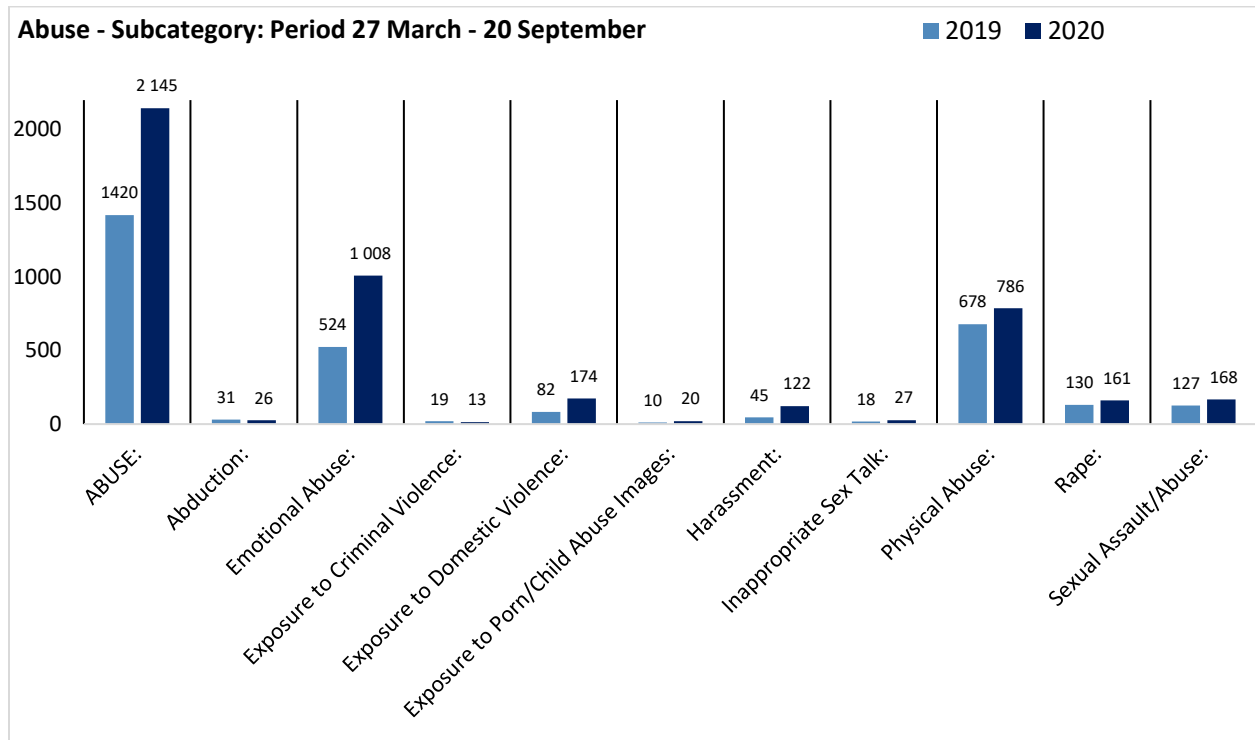
## 2. CATEGORIES – ALL

	2019	2020	% Increase
ABUSE:	1420	2,145	51%
ALTERNATIVE CARE:	24	72	200%
BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS:	188	318	69%
COMMERCIALISATION	27	23	-15%
DISABILITY:	11	50	355%
DISCRIMINATION:	397	14	-96%
FAMILY REL PROB:	20	1,225	6025%
HIV/AIDS:	39	45	15%
HOMELESSNES:	203	60	-70%
LEGAL ISSUES:	535	555	4%
NEGLECT:	25	709	2736%
PEER RELATIONSHIPS:	40	134	235%
PHYSICAL HEALTH:	98	19,510	19808%
POVERTY:	92	480	422%
PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH:	12	238	1883%
REFUGEE CHILD:	382	13	-97%
SCHOOL PROBLEMS:	1645	289	-82%
SERVICES:	46	12,860	27857%
SEXUAL:	217	67	-69%
SUBSTANCE ABUSE:	958	345	-64%
UNDEFINED / OTHER:	2390	4,805	101%

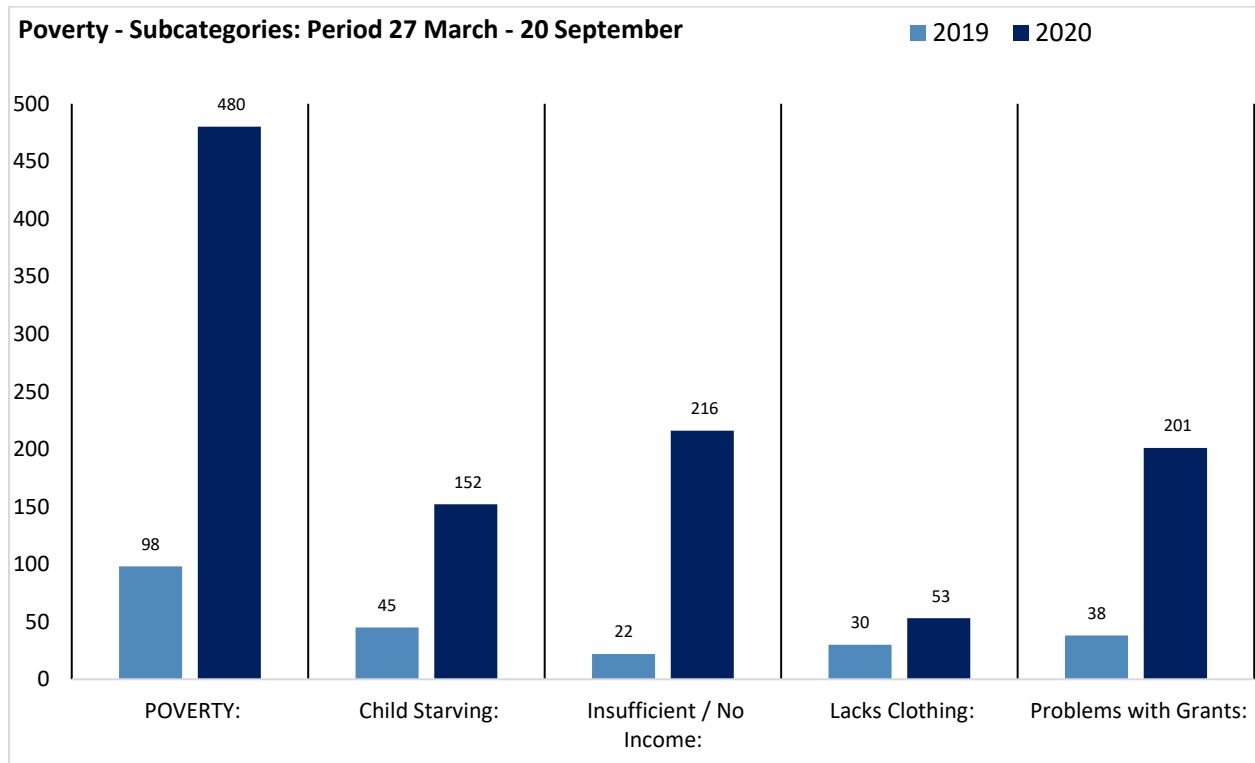
Category Comparison: Period 27 March - 20 September



### 3. ABUSE SUB-CATEGORIES



### 4. POVERTY SUB-CATEGORIES



## 5. FAMILY RELATED ISSUES SUB-CATEGORIES

