



Appendix G: Safe Helpline Data



Appendix G: Safe Helpline Usage and User Satisfaction Data

The Department of Defense (DoD) Safe Helpline supports the Department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs by providing crisis intervention, support, information and referrals to resources for members of the DoD community who have experienced sexual assault. The service is confidential, anonymous, secure, and available 24/7. The availability of an anonymous hotline ensures that all victims have a place to safely disclose their assault, express concerns, and obtain information and support.

Safe Helpline staff provide personalized assistance and referrals to military, veteran, and civilian service providers. Safe Helpline is many times the first place that victims report what happened. Often victims who are reluctant to report will instead call Safe Helpline to receive assistance. As such, Safe Helpline is a key source of support for victims who might not otherwise reach out for help through military channels, and has the potential to serve as point-of-entry that will lead a greater percentage of victims to report their assault. This summary provides an overview of the FY16 evaluation findings.

Website Usage and Outreach

The Safe Helpline website (safehelpline.org) saw a 67 percent increase (specifically, 54 percent for online sessions and 76 percent for phone sessions) from FY15 to FY16. In FY16, 16,913 users (10,579 phone users and 6,334 online users) contacted the Safe Helpline (Figure 1).

This increase may be attributed to increased outreach efforts. Specifically, the Safe Helpline team continued to support individual bases and installations, with 50 events—a 14 percent increase from events held in FY15—and increased online

advertising. The increased outreach brought more awareness to Safe Helpline as an important, unique resource that helps victims as well as their family and friends. These marketing efforts also contributed to a significant increase in unique website users, to 633,796, during FY16.

Safe Helpline Phone and Online Sessions

The findings, based on anonymous data, provide important information about the needs of victims, for whom anonymity and privacy are prominent concerns. Over half of victims (52 percent) disclosed that they had not yet reported to a military authority, and one-fifth of victims had not disclosed their assault to anyone prior to contacting Safe Helpline. Men were more likely to make a first-time disclosure on the SHL compared to women, with one out of four men not having disclosed to *anyone* prior to contacting Safe Helpline. The FY16 findings demonstrate how Safe Helpline serves as an important bridge to victim assistance, reporting, and recovery.

User Characteristics

Users were primarily victims contacting Safe Helpline to discuss issues related to sexual assault. Of the 2,331 sessions in which an event was discussed and user-victim relationship was disclosed, 75 percent of users identified as victims.

In addition to victims, users included friends, family members and intimate partners of the victim. Allied professionals and SARCs seeking information about services also used Safe Helpline. Some users called on behalf of victims to learn how they could provide support and to help prevent re-victimization.

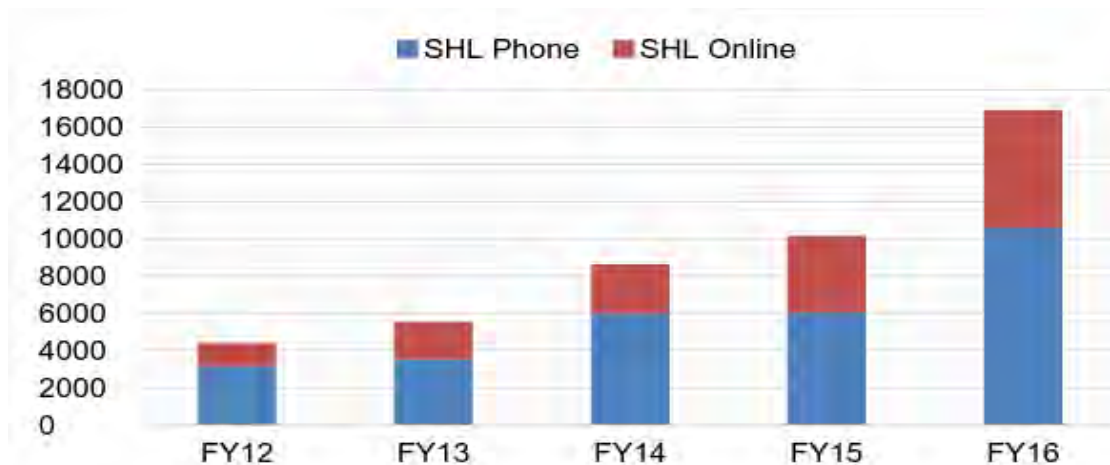


Figure 1: Safe Helpline Online and Telephone User Sessions Increased 67 percent

While women are the most frequent users of Safe Helpline, the available gender data indicated that roughly one-third of phone users (33 percent) are men.

Reporting Concerns

Users frequently contact Safe Helpline to discuss reporting-related concerns and connect to resources that might ultimately lead to an official report. The helpline fulfills victims' needs to disclose in a safe context, receive validation, and air their concerns safely and securely. As such, Safe Helpline can help to build confidence in the reporting process for victims who are reluctant to use military resources.

To provide a focused examination of reporting-related concerns, analyses were based on a sample of 1,186 users who identified as victims of adult sexual assault. Within this sample, the majority of cases involved both a military-affiliated victim and military-affiliated alleged perpetrator at the time of the event. The session assessment captures information about reporting-related concerns (barriers to reporting, motivations for reporting, and negative experiences in reporting). Key findings are as follows:

- Roughly half (53 percent) stated that they had not filed a report. Only 15 percent had already filed a report to a military

authority, while the remaining 32 percent of the sample did not disclose reporting status.

- Of the 125 victims who discussed motivations for reporting, the motivations most frequently mentioned included: to stop the offender from hurting others (37 percent), to punish the alleged offender (36 percent), to stop alleged offender from hurting the victim again (31 percent), and to seek mental health assistance (26 percent).

Concerns of Men Who Disclose Victimization

Safe Helpline plays a key role in the Department's efforts to enhance treatment and resources for male survivors. Safe Helpline staff receives specialized training in working with male survivors, which covers topics including social expectations, expectations of masculinity, and effects specific to male survivors, and a number of scenarios and exercises to engage the staff member during the training.

Because Safe Helpline estimates that one-third of phone users are men, Safe Helpline data is positioned to inform our understanding of concerns unique to male victims. In civilian samples, men take longer to disclose childhood sexual abuse because

of stigma¹, and recent work underscores the role of stigma as a particularly important barrier to reporting for men in the military.² Indeed, the data suggest that men who visit Safe Helpline have particularly elevated concerns about stigma. FY16 data expanded our understanding of men who visit Safe Helpline in several areas:

- Men were more likely than women to disclose their assault for the first time. Specifically, 27 percent of male victims (vs. 16 percent of female victims) had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting Safe Helpline.
- Although multiple alleged perpetrator rape was relatively rare overall, men were more likely than women to discuss this form of sexual assault (10 percent vs. 5 percent respectively).
- Men were more likely to discuss “obtaining mental health assistance” as a motivation for reporting. Specifically, of the victims who discussed motivations for reporting (31 men, 71 women), 48 percent of men noted obtaining mental health assistance versus 18 percent of women.
- Men are more likely to discuss self-conscious emotions such as shame or embarrassment relative to women (41 percent versus 32 percent respectively).

These findings demonstrate that Safe Helpline is an important part of SAPRO’s efforts to address the needs of men who are survivors of sexual assault.

Safe HelpRoom

Safe HelpRoom is an anonymous, moderated online group chat service that allows individuals who have experienced

¹ Easton, S. D. (2013). Disclosures of child sexual abuse among adult male survivors. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 41(4), 344-355.

² O’Brien, C., Keith, J., & Shoemaker, L. (2015). Don’t tell: Military culture and male rape. *Psychological Services*, 12(4), 357.

sexual assault in the military to connect with, and support, one another. In February of 2015, Safe HelpRoom services were expanded to allow 24/7 access. While overall visits to the Safe HelpRoom increased after this modification, very few sessions involved two or more users as the service was intended. While increased outreach efforts are needed to increase participation among military survivors, the Safe HelpRoom technology shows promise as a platform to facilitate communication among users including allied professionals in the field of sexual assault.

Referrals to Military Resources

Users accepted referrals to military resources in one-third (32 percent) of all sessions. One in five users (20 percent) accepted a referral to a SARC, indicating confidence in on-base/installation resources. Safe Helpline staff completed warm handoffs to on-base resources in 3 percent of phone sessions, and the majority of such sessions were transferred to SARCs. In fewer than 1 percent of sessions, a warm handoff was attempted but not successful.

For victims in particular, military resource referrals were accepted in 22 percent of sessions. Notably, one out of five victims (20 percent) stated that they had already accessed or attempted to access military services prior to contacting Safe Helpline. Many victims are interested in civilian resources as an alternative.

User Feedback

User satisfaction ratings remained high throughout FY16 even with the increase in user volume. Average ratings were above a 4.0 on a scale of 1-5 on all domains (ease of use, satisfaction with staffer knowledge, likelihood to recommend Safe Helpline, and intent to use resources provided). FY16 user satisfaction ratings were provided for 302 phone and 484 online sessions. Notably, Safe Helpline observed a 236 percent increase in the number of phone users

providing feedback, with average ratings ranging from 4.47 (ease of use) to 4.68 (likelihood to recommend the SHL). Average online user ratings ranged from 4.31 (ease of use) to 4.59 (likelihood to use the resources

provided). Most users indicated that they intended to use services recommended by Safe Helpline, and follow up support is now available for victims who desire additional help in connecting to resources.