



## Appendix E: Safe Helpline Data



# Appendix E: Safe Helpline Usage and User Satisfaction Data

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The Department of Defense (DoD) Safe Helpline provides crisis intervention, support, information, and referrals to resources for members of the DoD community who report experiencing sexual assault. The service is confidential, anonymous, secure, and available 24/7. The 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 often the first place that victims disclose an incident. As such, Safe Helpline is a key source of support for Service members who might not otherwise reach out for help through military channels. This summary provides an overview of users served and services provided by Safe Helpline in FY17.

## Safe Helpline Usage and Outreach

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The Safe Helpline website (safehelpline.org) experienced another year of user growth (See Figure 1). In FY17, 17,969 total users (11,528 phone users and 6,441 online users) contacted Safe Helpline for services. Given the wide variety of informational services offered by Safe Helpline, not all user contacts are from victims. Overall usage increased by six percent (specifically phone users increased by nine percent and online sessions increased by two percent) compared to the 16,913 users (10,579 phone users and 6,334 online users) who contacted Safe Helpline in FY16.

User growth follows increased outreach and online advertising efforts. Specifically, the Safe Helpline team continued to support individual bases and installations, with 100 events – a 50 percent increase from events held in FY16. The increased outreach brought

more awareness to Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC), Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocates (VA), and other members of the military community that Safe Helpline is an important, unique resource that helps victims as well as their family and friends.

## Safe Helpline Phone and Online Sessions

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This analysis of users and services provided is based on anonymous data obtained through calls and on-line chats. More than half of victims 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 Safe Helpline compared to women, with more than one out of four men (28 percent) not having disclosed to anyone prior to contacting Safe Helpline. These results underscore that 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. In addition to victims, users included friends, family members, and intimate partners of the victim. SARCs and other SAPR professionals 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-traumatization.

While women are the most frequent users of Safe Helpline, the available gender data

**Figure 1. Safe Helpline Online and Telephone User Sessions Increased 6%**

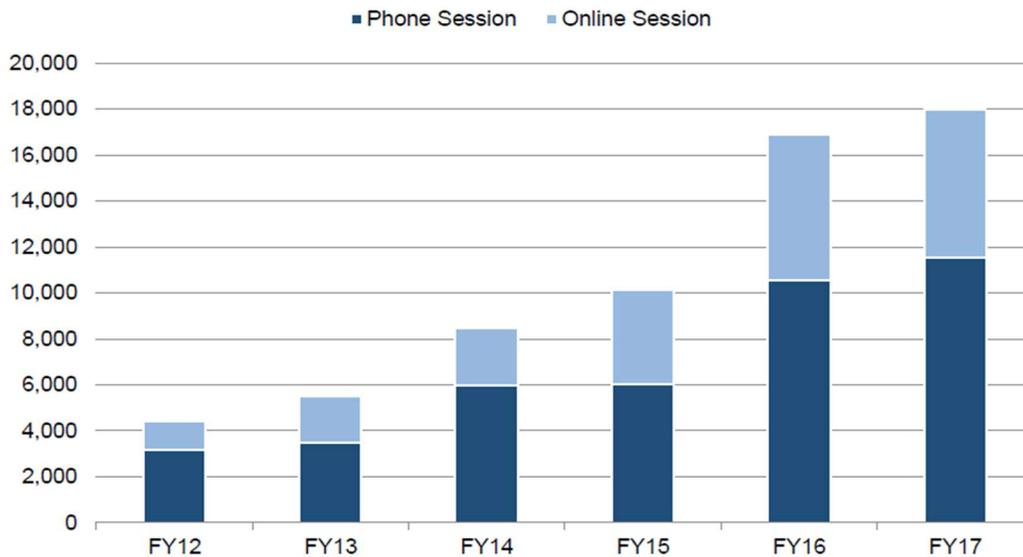


Figure 1: Safe Helpline Online and Telephone User Sessions

indicated that roughly one-third of phone users (31 percent) are men.

### Reporting-related Concerns

Users frequently contact Safe Helpline to discuss reporting-related concerns and to connect to resources. To better understand these concerns, the Department analyzed data from a sample of 941 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.

Key findings are as follows:

- Over half (56 percent) of the 941 users stated they had not made a sexual assault report. Only 15 percent of users had previously reported their incident to a military authority, while the remaining 30 percent of the sample did not disclose reporting status.<sup>1</sup>
- Of the 96 victims who described reasons why they might consider reporting, the

reasons most frequently mentioned included: to stop the alleged offender from hurting others (32 percent), to punish the alleged offender (31 percent), to seek mental health assistance (27 percent), and to stop the alleged offender from hurting the victim again (18 percent).<sup>2</sup>

In sum, this data demonstrates how Safe Helpline provides victims a place to disclose sexual assault in a safe context, receive validation, and air their concerns safely and securely. Available evidence indicates that Safe Helpline plays an important role in serving victims who are reluctant to use military resources.

### Concerns of Men Who Disclose Victimization

Safe Helpline plays a key role in the Department’s efforts to enhance support and resources for male Service members impacted by sexual assault. Safe Helpline staff receives specialized training that addresses men’s concerns, sexual assault stigma, and

<sup>1</sup> Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Safe Helpline staff were able to select more than one reason for reporting as disclosed by the user.

common physical and mental health complaints.

Because one-third of phone users are men, Safe Helpline data provides insight into concerns unique to male victims. In civilian samples, men take longer than women to disclose childhood sexual abuse because of stigma,<sup>3</sup> and recent work underscores the role of stigma as a particularly important barrier to reporting for men in the military.<sup>4</sup> FY17 data expanded the Department's understanding of men who visit Safe Helpline in several areas:

- Men were more likely than women to disclose their assault for the first time using Safe Helpline. Specifically, 28 percent of male victims (versus 16 percent of female victims) had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting Safe Helpline.
- Men were more likely than women to discuss “not wanting others to know” as a barrier to reporting (12 percent vs. four percent), suggesting that within the Safe Helpline user sample, men may have elevated privacy concerns compared to women.
- Men were more likely to discuss self-conscious emotions such as shame or embarrassment relative to women (46 percent versus 28 percent, respectively).

These findings have important implications for both Safe Helpline as well as the *Men's SAPR Plan*, described in the main body of this report.

## Safe HelpRoom

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Safe HelpRoom is an anonymous, moderated online group chat service that allows individuals who have experienced sexual assault in the military to connect with and support one another. In FY17, the Safe

HelpRoom hosted 1,221 visitors, including 59 sessions with two participants, three sessions with three participants, and one session with four or more participants. If a single user is present, Safe HelpRoom staff will check-in with users and can provide referrals to resources as needed.

To better connect users with the appropriate resources, the Safe HelpRoom established weekly sessions specifically for men affected by sexual assault. The system also launched a pilot program that allows local SARCs and SAPR VAs to leverage the Safe HelpRoom technology to host group chats within their own communities.

## Referrals to Military Resources

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Users accepted referrals to military resources in one-third (34 percent) of all sessions. One in four users (25 percent) accepted a referral to a SARC. At the user's request, Safe Helpline staff directly connected callers to on-base resources in four percent of phone sessions. Most calls were transferred to SARCs.

For victims in particular, military resource referrals were accepted in 25 percent of sessions. Notably, nearly one out of five victims (17 percent) stated that they had already accessed or attempted to access military services prior to contacting Safe Helpline. In more than one-third of sessions, victims were referred to civilian resources as an alternative.

## User Feedback

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Users provided satisfaction ratings for 174 phone and 393 online sessions in FY17. Ratings remained high throughout the year, even with the increase in user volume.

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<sup>3</sup> Easton, S. D. (2013). Disclosures of child sexual abuse among adult male survivors. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 41(4), 344-355.

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

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 the Safe Helpline, and intent to use resources provided). Specifically, average ratings ranged from 4.41 (ease of use) to 4.21

(satisfaction with staffer knowledge and likelihood to use the resources provided). Most users indicated that they intended to use the services recommended by the Safe Helpline staff.