



Appendix E: Safe Helpline Data



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The Department of Defense (DoD) Safe Helpline (SHL) provides crisis intervention, support, information, and referrals to resources for members of the DoD community who experience sexual assault. The service is confidential, anonymous, secure, and available at all times. Its availability ensures that everyone impacted by sexual assault has a place to safely talk about their experiences, express concerns, and obtain information. As such, this resource provides Service members and their families a key source of support, particularly for those who might not otherwise reach out for help through face-to-face military channels. DoD leverages SHL as an accessible point-of-entry for the military community that facilitates sexual assault reporting to Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocates (SAPR VAs) and other forms of assistance. This summary provides an overview of users served and services provided by SHL in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (FY20).

It is important to understand that what follows are “snapshots” of experiences by SHL users that happened to disclose such information in the course of their conversations with SHL staff. Since each of these “snapshots” involve different subsets of SHL users, we caution against drawing broad conclusions about the experiences of all persons using the helpline or military sexual assault victims in general.

Usage and Outreach

SHL was accessed by a growing number of users in FY20. In the past year, 49,746 users (41,875 online users and 7,871 phone users) contacted SHL for services (see Figure 1).

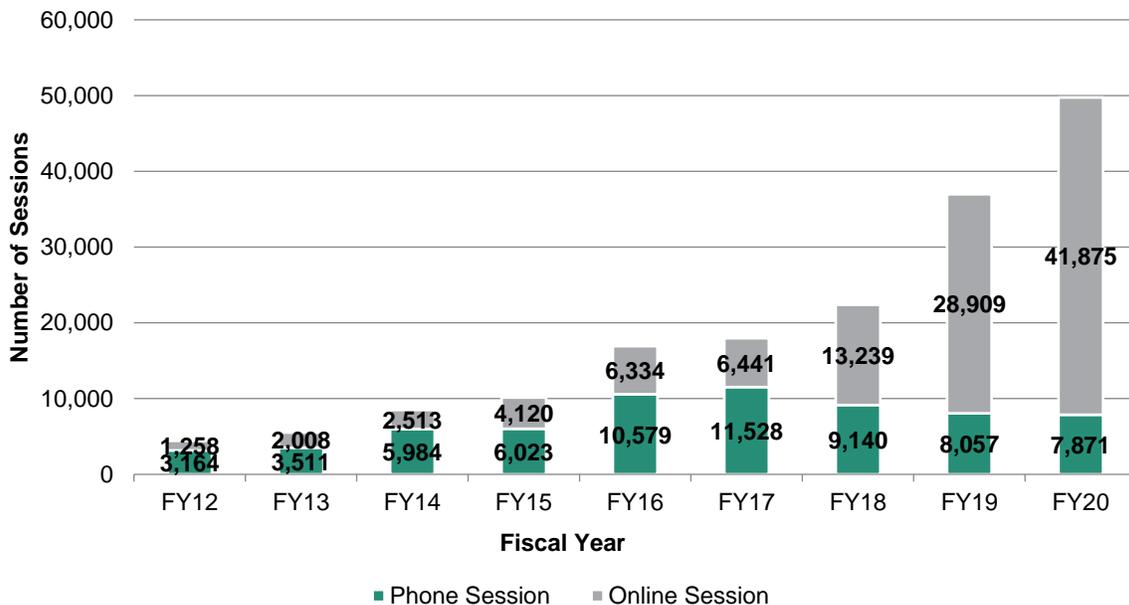


Figure 1. SHL Online and Telephone User Sessions

Phone and Online Sessions

The analysis of users and services provided is based on anonymous data obtained through calls and online chats. Information is never solicited. As a result, SHL staff do not always know if callers are currently a Service member, a retired or separated member, or in some other

status. Users in the following findings either called the SHL or engaged in a chat session with one of the service’s operators. Key FY20 findings, based on 4,109 in-depth session assessments, are outlined below.

User Characteristics

Users primarily identified themselves as victims contacting SHL to discuss issues related to their own sexual assault. Of the 2,611 sessions in which an event was discussed and the user-victim relationship was disclosed, 86 percent of users identified themselves as victims. In addition to victims, other users identified themselves as friends, family members, and intimate partners of a victim. Allied professionals and SARCs seeking information about services also used SHL. Some users called on behalf of a victim to learn how they could provide support and help prevent re-victimization. While women were the most frequent users, the available gender data indicated that when gender was known, 34 percent of the 651 phone users were men.

Disclosure

Of the 2,249 users who identified themselves as a victim of sexual assault, two-thirds mentioned whether or not they had previously disclosed their assault to any other party. Of those 1,492 that discussed disclosure, nearly one-third disclosed an assault for the first time on SHL, while two-thirds had previously disclosed to someone else before contacting the resource. It is important to note that disclosure in this context does not necessarily mean making an official report. It could simply mean that they told someone about their experience. Online users were more likely than telephone users to disclose for the first time on SHL. Specifically, when disclosure status was known, 34 percent of 1,045 online users (compared to 17 percent of 447 phone users) disclosed for the first time on the helpline.

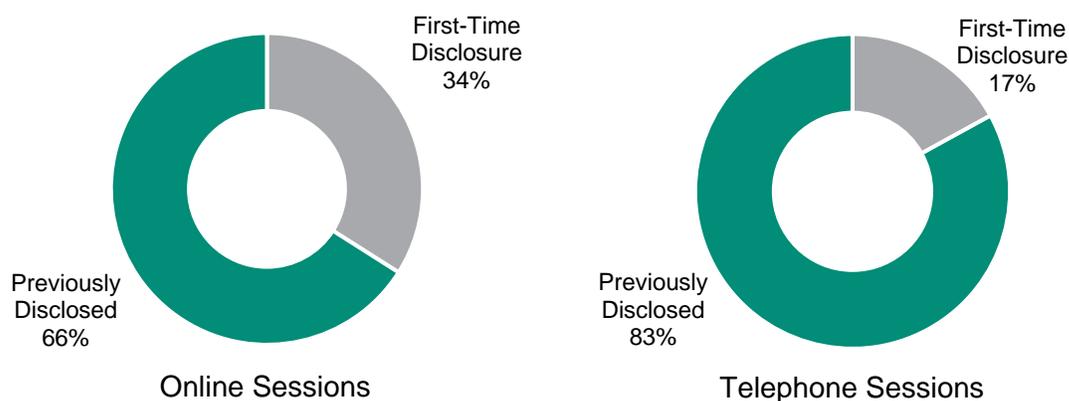


Figure 2. Disclosure by Type of Interaction

Of victims who previously disclosed before accessing the helpline (1,056 people), more than half (51 percent) discussed the reactions of those with whom they disclosed. The majority (66 percent) of these users discussed negative reactions, such as instances where they were treated differently, dismissed, blamed, not believed, or where the recipient took control of the situation by telling them what to do, or pressuring them to make a report.

Reporting Concerns

Users frequently contact SHL to discuss reporting-related concerns and connect to resources that might ultimately lead to an official report. To better understand these concerns, SAPRO analyzed data from a sample of 1,450 users who identified as adult victims of sexual assault in an FY20 SHL contact. Within this sample and when military status was known, most incidents discussed involved a military-affiliated victim or military-affiliated alleged perpetrator. Key findings pertaining to reporting concerns are as follows:

- More than half (53 percent) of the 1,450 users stated they had not yet made a sexual assault report, underscoring that SHL serves as an important first step for victim assistance, understanding reporting options, and recovery. Only 8 percent of users had previously reported their incident to a military authority, while 39 percent did not disclose whether they had reported or not.
- Of the 121 victims who discussed motivations behind their decision to report, the reasons most frequently mentioned were: to stop the alleged offender from hurting others (51 percent), to punish the alleged offender (36 percent), to stop the alleged offender from hurting the victim again (30 percent), and to seek mental health assistance (19 percent).¹

SHL provides victims a place to disclose sexual assault in a safe context, receive assistance, and securely air concerns. As such, SHL plays an important role in serving victims at all stages of the reporting process, including those who may be reluctant to use military resources.

Concerns of Men Who Disclose Victimization

SHL plays a key role in the Department's efforts to enhance support and resources for male Service members impacted by sexual assault. Staff receive specialized training in working with male survivors, which covers topics including social expectations, effects specific to male survivors, and scenarios and exercises to practice engaging with male survivors. SHL data provide insight into concerns unique to male victims, as one-third of phone users are men.

FY20 data expanded the Department's understanding of male SHL users in several areas. Men were more likely than women to disclose their assault for the first time on SHL. Specifically, 26 percent of 324 men (compared to 19 percent of 804 women) had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting SHL. Men were more likely to discuss past events, such as events that occurred one or more years ago, than women. This trend remained consistent for victims who had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting the helpline. These findings have important implications for both SHL as well as the *Men's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Plan*, described in the main body of this report.

Referrals to Military Resources

While many users reach out to SHL to disclose their assault and seek emotional support, only a portion of users are ready to receive referrals. Of the 4,109 user sessions analyzed:

- 12 percent of users accepted referrals to military resources in general
- 8 percent specifically accepted a referral to a SARC

¹ Percentages do not total to 100 percent because SHL staff were able to select more than one reason for reporting as disclosed by the user.

- 22 percent of sessions were phone sessions. Of phone sessions, 2 percent requested SHL staff directly connect the caller to on-base resources; most calls were transferred to SARCs
- 30 percent of users alternatively accepted a civilian referral
- 63 percent of users did not request, declined or, in the judgment of staff, did not appear ready for, a referral for services

In 2,249 of the 4,109 sessions, when users more specifically identified themselves as victims:

- 16 percent of victims accepted military resource referrals
- 11 percent specifically accepted a referral to a SARC
- 9 percent of victims stated that they had already accessed or attempted to access military services prior to contacting SHL

User Feedback

Users provided satisfaction ratings for 161 phone and 1,632 online sessions in FY20. Ratings remained high throughout the year despite the increase in user volume. Average ratings were above a 4.0 on a scale of 1-5 on all domains, including ease of use, satisfaction with staffer knowledge and service, likelihood to recommend SHL, and intent to use resources provided.

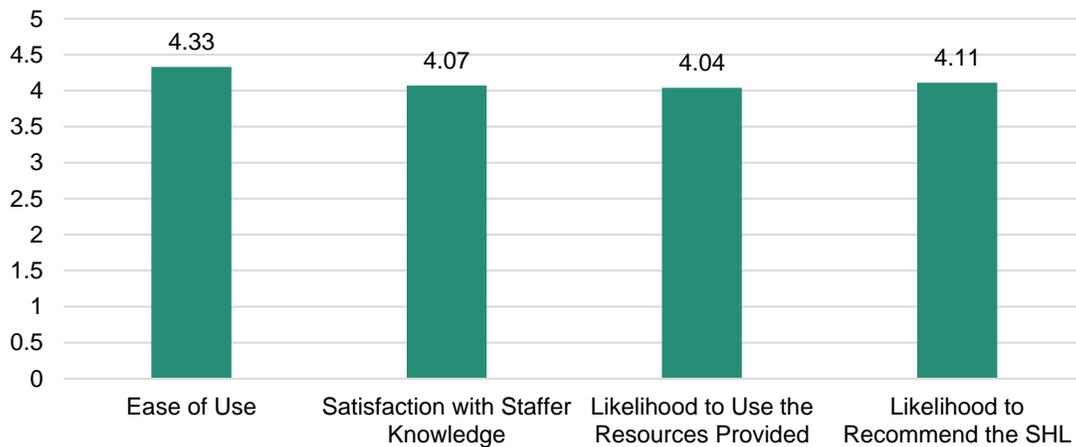


Figure 3. Average FY20 User Feedback Satisfaction Ratings (Scale of 1-5)

Additional Resources

SHL Educational Tools

In FY20, SHL launched *Brainstorming to Support Healing*, the sixth online self-paced educational program available through SHL. Users can access courses for Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP) credit through the learning management system or anonymously via the SHL website. A total of 4,142 users completed at least one course via the SHL learning management system. Additionally, 4,470 users accessed the courses anonymously via the SHL website however, given that this access was anonymous, their actual completion could not be tracked.

In addition, SHL also launched a short video (<https://safehelpline.org/SAFE>) to educate survivors on the process of Sexual Assault Forensic Exams in FY20. The video was viewed by 9,581 visitors.

Safe HelpRoom

Safe HelpRoom is an anonymous, moderated online group chat service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This resource allows individuals who have experienced sexual assault in the military to connect and support each other. Special sessions just for men are available every Sunday. In FY20, the Safe HelpRoom hosted 16,569 visitors. SHL staff documented 181 sessions where three or more users may have connected for 15 minutes or more, and 97 additional sessions where three or more users may have connected for 30 minutes or more.

Local Safe HelpRoom launched in May of 2018. This resource leverages existing Safe HelpRoom technology and puts it in the hands of local SARCs and SAPR VAs to operate their own online, moderated sessions. D-SAACP certified SARCs and SAPR VAs can be trained as moderators and are able to host their own sessions for their communities. In FY20, marketing strategies for Local Safe HelpRoom were expanded to further engage SARCs and SAPR VAs. During the year, SARCs and SAPR VAs hosted a total of 802 Local Safe HelpRoom Sessions.

Prison Rape Elimination Act Hotline

SHL serves as a hotline for individuals assaulted in military correctional facilities, playing a key role in the Department's implementation of the requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act. In FY20, SHL received 11 calls from users in military correctional facilities. In addition to providing crisis intervention, information, and referrals, staff assist callers with both Unrestricted and anonymous reports. Staff facilitate anonymous reports, complete mandated reporting as required by law, and facilitate warm handoffs to SARCs for Unrestricted Reports.

Coronavirus Pandemic Response

SHL continued to serve as a critical resource and force multiplier in the Department's sexual assault response efforts during the coronavirus pandemic. During FY20, SHL increased awareness efforts of the unique services and support available to victims, their family and friends, and the SAPR programs through 68 events, primarily virtual, and the deployment of social media surge campaigns. These efforts supported an increase in overall usage of SHL services. Specifically, the volume of online sessions increased 36 percent from Q1-Q2 to Q3-Q4 of FY20 and over 1.5 million unique website visitors accessed the SHL website.