

# **Men's Advice Line client satisfaction survey 2009-10 report**

**Thangam Debbonaire, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

## 1. Introduction

Respect, the national organisation of domestic violence intervention programmes and associated support services, runs three direct services: two telephone helplines (each with an email response capability) and an internet virtual child contact centre.

The two helplines are the Men's Advice Line for male victims of domestic violence and the Respect Phoneline for perpetrators of domestic violence. Both helplines also offer help to professionals working with the relevant category of client and to their friends, family and partners.

Both helplines have been accredited by The Helplines Association (THA). As a condition of their continued accreditation status they have to carry out a client satisfaction survey each year. The first client satisfaction survey was published in 2008.

Since that first evaluation (Debbonaire, 2008) the helplines have expanded in staff numbers and opening hours. Four staff and one coordinator now take calls.

The opening hours of both lines are now 10am – 5pm with the lines closed between 1 and 2. Emails are also used as a method of providing advice, information and support on both lines.

The helplines monitor their calls and from this monitoring it is evident that they receive and respond to calls from a mixture of callers, including male victims, professionals working with them and family or friends concerned about male victims.

## 2. Aims of the survey

This year the survey focussed purely on satisfaction with the call.

1. To investigate the satisfaction of people contacting the Men's Advice Line with the service they receive, by email or phone
2. To find out in particular if the callers/e-mailers were responded to promptly and courteously, whether or not they received help and advice they wanted, their overall levels of satisfaction, the type of advice and support they received and any suggestions for improving the service
3. To investigate this with a cross-selection of callers/mailers if possible
4. To prepare two short reports on the findings from each customer satisfaction survey, with, if appropriate, any recommendations for improving the service

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Phone interviews

All three Men's Advice Line workers (Simon, Natalie and Ali) took part in gathering contacts for the survey during November and December 2009 and late January and early February 2010.

A recruitment script was drafted and agreed with the helpline staff for them to use at the end of as many calls as they felt it was possible to do. This meant that callers who hung up or who were extremely distressed or angry were not asked. Callers were told that this was a survey of satisfaction with the

service, that their personal details would not be discussed and that it would help to improve the helpline they had called.

A total of 67 callers who had from the Men's Advice Line gave consent for their details to be passed to me.

At the end of most days, the helpline workers emailed the first name only, phone number, category of caller and if possible good times to call, to me. They also included the monitoring data they had already collected for this caller: ethnicity (using the main categories used by the UK census wherever possible or self-defined if the caller did not identify with any of these), age, county of residence, sexuality and gender.

I then aimed to call them all within 5 working days of their call to the helpline. Some were available immediately, others were not available, or did not answer. I used a phone with a blocked number on the initial call, unless the helpline worker specifically said that the caller's phone would not accept calls from blocked numbers. This was for the safety of the caller – if my number was visible and they were at threat from another person who was checking their phone, calling me back might compromise their safety. However, if calling from a blocked number repeatedly resulted in no answer, I used a specific phone with an unblocked number, and did not answer it if there were any returned calls.

### **3.2 Email data gathering**

More and more clients now use email as a means of contacting the helpline. An electronic questionnaire was prepared using the same or equivalent questions as the questionnaire for use in phone interviews, using Survey Monkey. The Coordinator emailed clients who had received an email service during November/December 09 and January/February 2010, explaining the scope of the client satisfaction survey for email clients and including a link to the electronic survey.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Who took part in the survey?

I carried out 36 telephone interviews with callers to the Men's Advice Line. 9 email clients responded to the electronic survey.

#### 4.1.1 Category of caller

According to the information presented during the call, by the caller to the helpline worker, they were classified as one of several categories as listed below. Some callers ring with problems which are not relevant to the helpline and none of these callers were asked to take part in the survey. It should be noted that the categorisation was made based on what callers were saying, using the assessment process described in the toolkit for working with male victims (Respect, 2009). This means that the category "perpetrator presenting as victim" is recorded whenever a caller identifies themselves as the victim but describes incidents in which they were the violent person and/or which cause their partner harm or injury or fear or control. This category is used cautiously by helpline workers and in previous evaluation of this service sometimes coincides with the caller also revising their own identification as a victim to that of a perpetrator or someone in a mutually violent relationship (Debbonaire, 2008).

Category of client as identified by the worker from information provided by the caller	Telephone survey Respondents
Perpetrator	2
Victim	16
Perpetrator presenting as victim	9
Professional	4
Friend/family	4
Missing data	1
TOTAL (n)	36

These proportions roughly reflect the proportions of callers as recorded by the helpline workers in their monitoring.

No data about category of caller was provided by the workers about the email respondents. However, unlike the telephone interviewees, the respondents to the electronic survey were asked about their own identification.

How would you describe your current or most recent relevant experiences of domestic violence or abuse (probably the reason why you called the helpline)?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Experiencing violence or abuse from partner or ex	50.0%	4
Using violence or abuse against partner or ex	0.0%	0
Using AND experiencing violence or abuse from and to partner/ex	12.5%	1
Friend or relative of someone experiencing violence/abuse	12.5%	1

Professional working with someone experiencing violence/abuse	0.0%	0
Friend or relative of someone who is using violence/abuse	0.0%	0
Professional working with someone using violence/abuse	0.0%	0
Someone have relationship problems but not violence	0.0%	0
Not sure	25.0%	2
Something else	0.0%	0
Say more if you wish		5
<b>answered question</b>		<b>8</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1</b>

One of the email respondents who answered 'not sure' to the above question, commented that wanting clarification about what was happening to them was the reason they contacted the service:

*'I was not sure whether my experiences with my ex-partner constitutes domestic violence or abuse. That's why I contacted the helpline for clarification and advice'. [electronic survey respondent]*

His comments following this, in the final suggestions and comments section, may suggest that his continued lack of certainty about this was because what he was experiencing perhaps didn't constitute domestic abuse or violence and this had been reflected in the response from the worker:

*'I think the helpline service should include an online service - broaden the scope of service for victims of domestic violence or abuse by including matters directly related to invasion of privacy and confidentiality by partner or ex'. [electronic survey respondent]*

Telephone and email clients often appear to gain helpful clarification and insight into what is going on in their relationship, and whether or not it constitutes abuse, as a result of talking about it to the worker, which is one of the benefits of this service.

#### 4.1.2 Age

What is your age?	Telephone survey	Electronic survey	Total
Under 18	0	0	0
18 – 21	0	0	0
21 – 30	1	3	4
31 – 40	6	3	8
41 – 50	14	1	15
51 – 60	7	1	8
Over 60	0	1	1
Missing data	9	0	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>45</b>

Professionals and friends/family are not asked what their age is – Helpline Workers only ask the demographic questions to clients experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence and abuse. However, the electronic survey allowed all respondents – including professionals – to answer demographic questions and some of them may have chosen to do so.

**FINDING: most of the respondents to the survey were between the ages of 31 and 50. None were below the age of 21.**

### 4.1.3 Ethnicity

	Telephone survey	Email survey	Total
White/British	18	6	24
Black/Afro-Caribbean	1	1	2
Indian/Pakistani/Asian	2	2	4
African	1	0	1
Other	3	0	3
Missing	11	0	20
<b>Totals</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>45</b>

Professionals and friends/family are not asked what their ethnic background is – Helpline Workers only ask the demographic questions to clients experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence and abuse. However, the electronic survey allowed all respondents – including professionals – to answer demographic questions and some of them may have chosen to do so.

Ethnicity was provided to me by the helpline worker passing the details of the caller on for me to call. This information was not always complete and so the data is not included for 11 of the telephone callers. 9 out of those 11 callers were professionals and friends/family and Helpline Workers don't ask them to define their ethnic background.

**FINDING: at least 10 of the respondents to the surveys were from ethnic groups other than White/British, which is just over a third of the respondents. This provides a good spread of ethnicities within the respondent group.**

### 4.1.4 Geography

The callers were from around England, Wales (1) and Scotland (1).

### 4.1.5 Sexuality

Telephone callers were asked their sexuality in most cases by the worker who took their call, who then provided this information, where available, to me. Email respondents were also asked to identify their sexuality. The results are as follows:

	Telephone interviews	Email survey	Total
Heterosexual	27	9	36
Lesbian/gay/bisexual	1	0	1
Missing	8	0	8

The data recorded was provided by the worker passing the caller details across to the researcher. I did not ask any supplementary questions about sexuality. Helpline workers don't record sexuality for professionals or friends/family, only for clients experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence and abuse. However, the email survey allowed all clients to identify their sexuality and some professionals chose to answer the question. The gay male caller to the Men's Advice Line was open with me about his sexuality but did not raise this as an additional challenge for him in receiving help for his experiences.

**FINDING: almost all of the respondents to the survey were heterosexual. This may indicate that gay and bisexual callers did not agree to take part, or that there were very few of these callers while recruiting for the survey was taking place. However, other monitoring from the helplines suggests that gay and bisexual men are calling the helpline sometimes, which suggests that either they did not agree to take part on this occasion or that the nature of their call made it impossible to ask them to take part.**

#### 4.1.6 Numbers per worker

The callers were passed to me from all three of the helpline workers taking calls on the Men's Advice Line, with a good range.

#### 4.2 Choice of using email rather than phone

The 9 survey respondents who completed the electronic survey because they had approached the helpline by email were asked why they had used email rather than the phone to contact the helpline. Their answers were as follows:

Why did you decide to use the email method of contact, rather than telephoning the helpline?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Email feels more anonymous than phone	55.6%	5
Emailing is more convenient for me	44.4%	4
I prefer to express myself in writing	44.4%	4
Phone line not open at hours I wanted	11.1%	1
Didn't know I could telephone	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		0
<b>answered question</b>		<b>9</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>

None of these email respondents gave any further information about their choice of method.

### 4.3 Speed of getting a response

Most of the telephone clients got through to speak to someone straight away.

28 out of the 36 callers to the MAL got through straight away, 7 did not and 1 wasn't sure.

When callers left a message on the helpline voicemail service, all of them received a call back within the helpline target time limit of 2 days. Most were called back the same day or within an hour. Out of the 7 callers who didn't get through straight away 5 chose to leave a message and 2 didn't; 4 were called back on the same day and 1 within 2 working days.

**FINDING: all the telephone callers included in the survey were responded to immediately or called back within the target date for the model of work.**

Respondents to the electronic survey were asked if they were satisfied with the length of time it took for them to get a response, as it was not possible, due to the nature of how emails arrive and are responded to, to explore how long it took. They responded as follows:

How satisfied were you with the length of time it took for you to receive a reply to your email?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Extremely satisfied	55.6%	5
Quite satisfied	33.3%	3
Satisfied	11.1%	1
Not very satisfied	0.0%	0
Completely unsatisfied	0.0%	0
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**FINDING: all of the email clients were satisfied with the length of time it took for them to receive a reply to their email.**

### 4.4 Satisfaction with the call

The interviewees, but not the email respondents as this question was not relevant, were asked how well they thought the helpline worker had listened to them, on a scale of 1 to 5. They responded as follows:

<b>How well did the worker listen to you?</b>	<b>Telephone survey (n=36)</b>
5 – extremely well	28
4 – very well	4
3 - pretty well	4
2 – not that well	0
1 – not well at all	0

The interviewees and email respondents were asked how well they felt the helpline worker had understood their particular situation on a scale of 1 to 5. They responded as follows:

<b>How well did the worker understand your situation?</b>	<b>Telephone survey (n=36)</b>	<b>Email respondents (n=9)</b>	<b>Total</b>
5 – extremely well	25	5	30
4 – very well	3	4	7
3 - pretty well	7	0	7
2 – not that well	1	0	1
1 – not well at all	0	0	0
Missing data	0	0	0

The interviewees and email respondents were asked how helpful they felt the worker or email response was, on a scale of 1 to 5. They responded as follows:

<b>How helpful was the worker/response?</b>	<b>Telephone survey (n=36)</b>	<b>Email respondents (n=9)</b>	<b>Total</b>
5 – extremely helpful	23	1	24
4 – very helpful	1	6	7
3 - pretty helpful	8	2	10
2 – not that helpful	1	0	1
1 – not helpful at all	0	0	0
Can't say	3	0	3
Missing data	0	0	0

There were no significant differences between the three workers who take calls on the Men's Advice Line. There were also no significant differences between the categories of callers as identified by the worker: most of the men categorised by the worker as victims were satisfied, as were most of the men categorised as perpetrators presenting as victims. This strongly suggests that workers are clear, factual and respectful to callers, and try to find information to help them.

**FINDING:** almost all the callers and email clients to the Men’s Advice Line were extremely or very satisfied with the listening, understanding and helpfulness of the response they received from the worker.

**FINDING:** in particular, 22 out the 36 (61.1%) of telephone respondents answered “extremely” or “very” well or helpful to all three satisfaction questions.

**FINDING:** the clients who contacted the service by email were also almost all extremely or very satisfied with the understanding and helpfulness of the response they received.

**FINDING:** in particular, 4 out of 9 (80%) of email respondents answered “extremely” or “very” well and “extremely” or “very” helpful to both satisfaction questions.

**FINDING:** client satisfaction was unrelated to which helpline worker responded to them.

#### 4.5 Outcomes of the response provided

Callers and email clients were asked if the helpline worker had been able to give them information that they needed and if not, if they were given an explanation. The responses were as follows:

Were you given information you needed?	Telephone survey (n=36)	Email clients (n=9)	Totals
Yes or partly yes	25	5	30
No	5	1	6
Not sure	5	3	8
Not relevant	1	0	1
Missing	0	0	0

One caller said that they couldn’t answer this question as they weren’t looking for any information and didn’t feel any was needed, they just wanted someone to talk to and that was what they gained from the call. The 5 who said they weren’t sure were callers who felt that they didn’t know if the information they had been given was going to be useful or not.

**FINDING:** most of the callers and email clients were given information they needed.

Callers and email clients were asked if they had taken any action as a result of the information they had been given in the response from the helpline worker. The responses were as follows:

Have you taken any action as a result of the call?	Telephone survey (n=36)	Email clients (n=9)	TOTALS (n=45)	Percentage of total
Yes	26	3	29	64.4%
Not yet but I intend to	2	3	5	11.1%
No	7	2	10	22.2%
Not sure	1	1	2	4.4%
Missing	0	0	0	0

This email client made a comment which is a good example of the value of having the complementary email and telephone services:

*'I have tried to go away from any conflict. Not ready to talk to anyone on the phone yet'* [electronic survey]

He had found the advice provided by email helpful but was glad that he could do this by email.

**FINDING: Three quarters of the total number of callers and email clients to the Men's Advice Line had either already taken some action as a result of the call by the time of the survey (64.4% of total) or intended to (11.1% of total).**

## 4.6 Overall satisfaction

### 4.6.1 Recommending the helpline to someone else

The callers and email clients were asked if they would recommend the helpline service to someone else in a similar situation. This was intended to find out more about their overall levels of satisfaction with the result of the call or email. The results were as follows:

Would you recommend the helpline to someone else in a similar situation?	Telephone survey (n=36)	Email survey (n=9)	Totals
Yes or probably	31	9	40
No	4	0	4
Not sure	1	0	1
Missing	0	0	0
Total	36	9	45

**FINDING: Most of the callers and all of the email clients definitely or probably would recommend the helpline to another person in a similar situation, indicating a high level of overall satisfaction with the result of the call or email service.**

#### 4.6.2 Who was not satisfied?

Three of the callers to the Men's Advice Line would not recommend the helpline to someone else and one wasn't sure. The three who definitely wouldn't recommend the service were two who the worker identified as a victim and one who the worker identified as a perpetrator identifying as a victim. The one who wasn't sure was a victim.

These responses would at first seem to contradict the scores given by these callers to the satisfaction ratings, which were all 3 or more. However, when coupled with their comments in answer to the question which followed ("do you have any suggestions for how the helpline could improve?") it raises questions about how best to respond to clients with complex needs and expectations. Whilst this is a very small number of disgruntled clients, they are an interesting source of data worthy of some further exploration here and in other study. It is also possible that other clients who were not satisfied did not agree to take part in the survey. This does not necessarily mean that they were provided with an inadequate service: a caller may feel unsatisfied for all sorts of reasons which are nothing to do with the actual response or information they received. However, further exploration of these clients and their needs may help the helpline to develop the considerable expertise the staff already clearly have in responding to challenging clients or those who are very distressed or angry.

*'I needed somewhere to live but he couldn't provide that. No help given in the end, though it's a helpline'. [telephone interview]*

*'I don't think it was her fault, she advised me to do things I'd already done and I thought were obvious. The whole service was very disappointing because it didn't give me anything new, if it's called a helpline, then they should help. Where is the support? Why isn't anyone coming round to my house to help me? They would if I were a woman'. [telephone interview]*

These comments are examples of callers asking for services or help which is beyond the scope of the helpline. A helpline worker is clearly not in a position to carry out house calls. The lack of specialist outreach or refuge services for male victims at a local level mean that helpline workers are often not able to suggest a particular local service who could provide face to face contact. At the time of writing, many services across the UK which were formerly women only services are now expanding to provide generic and specialist services for male victims, so in time, the helpline will have access to information which would perhaps satisfy callers like the ones who made the comments above. It would be helpful for the helpline to continue to monitor the developments of local specialist services if possible, perhaps carrying out annual surveys of local specialist resources as well as encouraging local services to contact helpline workers with up to date contact information. This is something which the Men's Advice Line and Respect websites could actively encourage, perhaps with a downloadable simple form for local organisations to submit information, which could then be verified before adding to the existing contact list.

The following comments are also from callers who were not satisfied:

*'Didn't feel particularly supported, didn't help me turn things around, maybe slightly unfair and reductionist'. [telephone interview]*

*'I learnt more off the internet, I got more optimistic from it. Speaking to someone actually pushed me back a bit.' [telephone interview]*

These comments reflect the callers' dissatisfaction and serve as a reminder, set against the rest of the feedback from other callers, that no service can provide exactly what every caller wants all the time.

In these cases it is possible from their comments that they had a heightened and strongly expressed sense of injustice at a range of matters, including, but not only, their own experiences with the helpline. It may also indicate frustration with some of the questions which the helpline workers have to ask in order to provide appropriate help and advice, such as asking about what the partner might be feeling and if they have ever felt they have to use violence against their partner. It is also possible that the helpline worker had clarified information gathered from the internet and that the caller had been disappointed to hear the information they were given, such as finding out it may be costly to pursue legal action or that housing applications take time. It is beyond the scope of this feedback survey to explore this in more detail. However, future monitoring and analysis of caller responses to the service they receive from the Men's Advice Line may help to explore more about how to help frustrated clients.

#### 4.7 Any further comments/suggestions

The majority of further comments were positive, sometimes with suggestions for improvement. This comment typifies several made about all three helpline workers:

*'No, it was absolutely brilliant. She listened, she understood, she gave me the help I needed'* [telephone interview]

17 callers, when asked if they had any more comments or suggestions, voluntarily expressed high levels of satisfaction from the helpline.

*'The fact that I phoned up out of the blue and I was on the phone for 1 1/2 hours, didn't feel rushed at all and I thought it was excellent'* [telephone interview]

*'She gave me a specific telephone number but more importantly an intelligent ear and intelligent mouth. I would like you all to be paid more so that lines can be open 24 hours like the Samaritans'* [telephone interview]

Three telephone respondents and one electronic survey respondent talked about opening hours:

*'He was understanding, listened, gave me advice .Only problem is that helpline is open only during daytimes and weekdays, nothing outside working hours, could they do one evening per week? I'd been thinking about it for a couple of weeks but I couldn't call'* [telephone interview]

*'Please be open 1 - 2 and come in late?'* [electronic survey]

Some did not agree with the advice given to them:

*'Some good and some bad advice, I didn't agree with everything, although I think he gave a brilliant service, I just had a different opinion on things'* [telephone interview]

The following caller reflected the comments of four other callers who, whilst they expressed some positive comments about the helpline workers, seemed resentful that the helpline couldn't meet all their needs:

*'Don't understand what sort of helpline it is if it can't do anything practical. I need practical help'* [telephone interview]

This sort of criticism seems to be based on an unrealistic ideal of what a national telephone helpline can provide. However, this may also be a general tendency amongst a minority of callers to any helpline, partly generated by the very existence of so many helping agencies and services providing such a good service across a range of needs – an expectation that there will always be someone else to place a problem on to.

Some of the criticisms and some of the praise referred to being able to speak to the same worker on more than one occasion:

*'The e-mail invited me to phone and discuss, I later did phone and was not able to talk to the same advisor'* [electronic survey]

*'Make it 24 hours. Sometimes you need someone to talk to, if you can't sleep or if the situation escalates in the evening, the Men's Advice Line is the only service that helped me. They even remembered me immediately without any notes, I'd called before, that was great!'* [telephone interview]

[Caller spoke to N and S on two different occasions.] *'N. calmed me down and S gave me information'* [telephone interview]

*'N was great and my partner called N too, I was glad we both could speak to the same person'* [telephone interview with victim's new partner]

Clearly it is not always going to be possible to ensure that the same worker speaks to the same client every time they make contact or that it will always be the same worker who takes a call for a victim after someone else has initially called on their behalf. In some cases it may be a benefit for the caller to speak to different people, as one of the caller's above states. In others this may be a source of frustration.

**FINDING: consistency of worker from one call to the next is often helpful and when this happens callers appreciate it.**

**FINDING: a change of worker from one call to the next can also be beneficial.**

## 5. Analysis

Almost all of the respondents were very satisfied with the service they received and confirmed that they would recommend the service to others. There were no significant differences between levels of satisfaction of callers who had spoken to specific workers. This suggests that the helpline is recruiting and maintaining skilled specialist staff. There were not significant differences between other categories such as ethnicity, age or category of caller. Again, this strongly suggests that the helpline staff are skilled in responding to a range of experiences and needs and to callers who ring in a range of emotional states including anger, despair and frustration.

## 6. Conclusions

The helpline staff are clearly skilled, knowledgeable and respectful in the responses they provide. Callers are overwhelmingly positive about the service and there is a clear value in this specialist service. There is evidence that this service requires specialist skills and knowledge which would not be available routinely in generic helplines, which supports the continuing need for this specialist service. It is important to note that the need to be able to refer to local specialist services was often critical: this helpline is a complement to and a route towards, not a replacement for, local services or legal rights.

The helpline is a rich source of data and expertise about the needs of male victims, including specific needs for specific groups, which can and will be explored in more detail over the coming years. This would help to amplify the understanding of how and when callers and email clients will and will not be satisfied with the service, how to change this if appropriate and when to accept that some clients will never be satisfied and respond with respect nevertheless, something which the helpline workers clearly already do. The value of further research on this client group is something which the staff and coordinator are already aware of and working on. It will be interesting to see how this affects the development of the services and the feedback from clients in future years.

The helpline has expanded its service since the last customer feedback survey and the results are clearly that more people are receiving more help.

The staff and coordinator of the Men's Advice Line are to be commended for the service they provide and the commitment they show to the people contacting them.

**Thangam Debonnaire, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010**