

***“I just wanted to talk to
someone who would
understand”***

A report of an evaluation of the Men’s Advice Line

**Thangam Debonnaire
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Data assistant

Kevin Walton

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Men's Advice Line for male victims of domestic violence was re-launched in February 2007 under Respect management. There is a helpline worker, supervised by the Respect Phoneline Co-ordinator. The helpline is open for six hours per day on three weekdays per week. Callers can contact the service by email. The helpline has TypeTalk and Language Line capability enabling it to respond a wider diversity of callers. The helpline is a member of the Telephone Helplines Association (THA) and has applied for accreditation in 2008. A condition of accreditation is external evaluation of the quality of service.

From the most recent monitoring figures the helpline received 900 calls in its first year, opening 3 days per week. Roughly 33% of callers are victims of domestic abuse, 35% are friends/family/professionals and 8% are perpetrators, including some presenting as victims. 11% are from other categories of callers and the remaining 13% are calls not applicable to the purpose of the helpline. Ideally the evaluation should include interviews with 10% of the callers within the 3 month period of the evaluation. This would mean aiming to recruit 30 callers to be interviewed. However, this number would be too low to provide enough variance in the sample to be valid, particularly as there needs to be a representative number of victims, agencies, friends/family and others in the sample. The aim will therefore be to interview 60 callers, around 22% of the callers in the three month period.

Measuring long term outcomes for the callers to the service or for their clients is not possible within the confines of a project focused evaluation such as this. The outcomes for the calls, according to the model of work, are based on providing information, referral and immediate reassurance, not providing long term solutions directly. There is more information about the outcomes and how they are related to this evaluation later in this document.

II EVALUATION PROCESS

2.1 Purposes of the evaluation

1. To evaluate the quality of the service provided to callers to the Men's Advice Line (including male victims of domestic violence and professionals and other individuals wanting to help them) against the standards set in the model of work and any other relevant documents.
2. To evaluate the value of the service directly to callers and indirectly to other people such as their clients etc.
3. To provide a report detailing the findings of the above analysis and making recommendations if necessary about future development.

2.2 Evaluation methods

1. Recruitment of interviewees by the Men's Advice Line worker, using a pre-determined script, agreed between the worker, the coordinator and me. The worker aimed to ask as many callers as possible, at the end of the calls, for their permission to pass on their names and contact details to the evaluator, during mid January 2008 until mid April 2008 (3 months). They will still have the option of changing their minds about participation. The contact information for these callers was passed on to me within 24 hours of them giving agreement for the evaluator to contact them.
2. I attempted to make contact with as many callers who have given their permission for this to take place as possible, to give further information and to arrange an interview time. In most cases the interview took place immediately.
3. I carried out telephone interviews lasting from 5 – 20 minutes with 21 people who called the service during January – March 2008, within 7 days of their call taking place. I tried to achieve a representative sample and one which has sufficient numbers of small categories of callers (e.g. gay men who are victims of domestic abuse from a male partner, Asian men) to provide some variation. These interviews aimed to assess the content and quality of the calls and provide some indication of possible outcomes and value.
4. I interviewed 5 people 4 – 8 weeks after the initial interview. These people were to be recruited from the first sample in order to assess in greater detail the outcomes and value of the calls.
5. I carried out 2 x 45 minute interviews with the phonenumber coordinator and Men's Advice Line worker, to discuss and review how they respond to calls against the model of work. This will include looking at the specific challenges of working with this particular client group, such as lack of services to refer callers on to.
6. I observed the Men's Advice Line worker taking calls, approximately 5 calls each if possible during a half day.

The service users making contact by email were not included in the sample as they are not the subject of this evaluation. However, the evaluation tools used will be made available to the

phoneline coordinator who could use these for internal auditing of the service provided to these people at a later date.

2.3 The assessment of quality of response

This element of the evaluation looked at:

1. Prompt answering and responses
2. Clear explanations of the nature and purpose of the service
3. Active listening
4. Reassurance
5. Pausing calls and how this is dealt with
6. Length of calls and how this is managed
7. Accurate information
8. Use of aids such as typetalk and language line
9. Responding to complaints

These are qualities specified by the model of work. The assessment of these qualities was done partly through the interviews with callers and partly through interviews with and observation of the staff and assessing how they respond to calls against the criteria in the model of work.

2.4 The assessment of possible outcomes

The Men's Advice Line aims to provide a reassurance, support and a range of information relevant to the particular category of caller, as specified in the model of work. Initial interviews with callers and follow up interviews with a smaller sub set of callers will therefore look at:

1. State of mind after the call
2. Signposting to other agencies
3. Understanding of relevant rights
4. Accurate, relevant and helpful information
5. Other outcomes, for example, if they think they are safer

All the items on the list were determined partly by the individual needs and circumstances of the individual caller as these were revealed during the interview.

2.5 Content of the questionnaires for callers

2.5.1 Initial interviews

The questionnaires for the initial interviews covered the content, quality and initial outcomes of the call. There were specific sections of the questionnaires for victims, friends/family/agencies, for perpetrators and for others. The structure of the questionnaires was designed to help me

to identify which category each interviewee comes into. The content of the questionnaires was based on the model of work for the helpline. Questions were a mixture of direct and indirect. Callers were not asked about their own experience of domestic violence, only about the calls. Some callers did reveal information about their experience of domestic violence.

2.5.2 The second follow up round of interviews

These interviews took place with a selection of interviewees who gave their permission at the end of the initial interview for me to call back about a month later. Questions included in these interviews were about:

1. Action taken as a result of the call
2. The impact of this action on the caller, on any significant others such as clients of professionals calling, or children of victims calling
3. Reflection on the quality of the call

2.6 Evaluation tools

The evaluation tools included the following:

1. Permission script for the helpline worker to use to recruit interviewees
2. Form for the helpline worker to use to record contact information and pass it on to the evaluator
3. Questionnaire for initial interviews
4. Statement of practice for the evaluator to ensure that the calls are consistent with the procedures for maintaining safety and confidentiality for callers to the helpline and others who may be affected, such as partners/ex-partners of callers/interviewees.
5. SPSS data analysis file to analyse the results of the initial interviews
6. Questionnaire for follow up interviews
7. SPSS data analysis file to analyse the results of the follow up interviews

2.7 Ethics, confidentiality and safety

By the very nature of the service, the majority of the callers to the helpline were either at risk from an individual known to them or a risk to another. The evaluation did not require me to have full or even genuine names for the callers and I did not ask for personal information such as address, surname, names of children or partner etc.

I abided by the guidelines in the model of work and confidentiality guidelines. This includes paying particularly attention to considerations of safety of the callers or of their partners/ex-partners. In calls to victims who have used the service, for example, this will include being alert to the possibility that they may need to be reminded of the relevant services available to them and how to contact these services. It also included paying attention to who answers the call and if necessary, for example if someone unexpected answers a call, asking for someone of another name and saying that this must be a wrong number.

The confidentiality policy was the main source of guidance for the safety considerations and wherever necessary I consulted the phonenumber coordinator. The confidentiality policy and the conditions of the evaluation mean that I was not informed in advance which category of caller the caller comes from. The helpline workers were asked only to collect details from perpetrators, victims and friends/family/professionals, not from callers wanting a different service or other unsuitable callers.

2.8 Sample analysis

The helpline workers recruited 34 volunteers for interviews during the three month period, during which time approximately 242 callers were possible interviewees (excluding inappropriate callers). This means that 14% of possible callers were recruited. There were 21 initial interviews carried out. This means that 11.5% of possible interviewees were interviewed by phone during this period.

The 21 interviewees were as follows:

- **All interviewees were male (100%)**
- Almost all were explicit that the relationship they were discussing was one with a woman, two were vague and none explicitly described the relationship as same-sex. Callers were not asked direct questions about sexuality in interviews. There are other specific services for gay male victims of domestic violence provided by LGBT organisations. The phonenumber coordinator and the helpline worker felt that abused gay men were more likely to be calling these services; certainly the available data about gay men's use of this helpline appears that they are calling in very small numbers only. Available research on prevalence of domestic abuse in gay male relationships strongly suggests that as many as half of all male victims of domestic abuse could be being abused by a male partner or ex-partner (Stanko, 2000). This is not reflected in the user statistics from the helpline or in the interviews for this evaluation.
- **Interviewees came from 15 different counties** in England and Wales. The helpline took calls from at least 28 different counties in England and Wales during this period.
- **15 (68.2%) of the interviewees identified as "white"**, "white British" or "white English". 3 (13.6%) identified as Afro-Caribbean or Black, 2 (9.1%) identified as "Asian" and a further 2 (9.1%) as "mixed race". Compared to the population of the UK as described by the UK Census 2001, this (31.8%) is an over-representation of non-white interviewees – the percentage of non-white UK residents is 7.9% (Office of National Statistics, 2001). The largest single non-white population of UK is Asian (4%) and the second largest is Black or Black British.

Age of caller

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	21-29	1	4.5
	30-39	12	54.5
	40-49	4	18.2
	50-59	5	22.7
	Total	22	100.0

- **The range of ages was from 25 to 59**, 1 of the interviewees was under 30, 12 were in their 30s (54.5%), 4 in their 40s and 5 in their 50s.
- **From the answers they gave to the questions** “why did you call the helpline that day?” and “what were you hoping to gain from the call?”, plus other data given during the interview, I was able to identify some interviewees clearly as the primary or sole victim of domestic violence in their relationship and some for whom it was less clear.

Caller ID

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	victim, partner is abuser	13	59.1
	victim, ex is abuser	1	4.5
	not clear	8	36.4
	Total	22	100.0

- The proportions of interviewees **victims:perpetrators:professionals and others** was not possible to estimate properly as it was not clear in 8 interviews if the interviewee was a primary victim or perpetrator. However, it was clear in all 21 interviews that the interviewee was not a professional or friend/family member seeking help for another person.
- I observed the helpline in operation for approximately two hours in total, on one occasion. This included observing 5 calls but not listening in on the caller – I could only hear the helpline worker.

2.9 Limitations of the data set

First of all, this was a disappointingly low number of callers giving permission and one which could not provide a sample large enough to draw general conclusions from. Data from 21 individual callers and observation of 5 calls is not sufficient to do this. However, this data is from more than one in ten callers during a three month period and provides some verification of the nature, quality and content of the service against the model of work. No general conclusions about male victims or specific services for male victims should be drawn. In particular, gay men appear to be very under-represented in this sample.

By the nature of the service being evaluated and the methods of evaluation, certain categories of people are excluded from the list of people included as possible interviewees:

- These who never got through to the Men's Advice Line if they did not leave a message for the staff to call back.
- Those for whom the call was very short, for example, asking for a simple piece of information such as a phone number – in most cases the helpline worker did not feel that it was appropriate or possible to ask these callers although a few callers who had called over something quite simple did take part. These callers are likely to be satisfied with the service they received as the most common information requested is phone numbers for existing services, according to the staff.
- Any callers who hung up or ended the call abruptly leaving the worker no chance to ask.
- Those callers who were distressed or angry at the end of the call – again, this does not happen often but when it does happen, it is often not appropriate to ask their permission to take part in the evaluation.
- Those callers who refused to take part in the evaluation for other reasons. We do not know why they refused to take part: it could be as simple as not having the time or wanting to forget about the call.
- Those callers for whom the worker did not feel the request was appropriate for other reasons, such as safety.

The limitations were further compounded by the drop off rate from volunteering for interview to carrying out an interview – one third of those who gave consent were not interviewed.

Extensive attempts were made to contact all those who volunteered for interview including the 13 for whom no interview was carried out. 3 gave incorrect phone numbers. 3 declined to be interviewed once contact was made, 1 claimed not to remember the call or giving permission, 1 was not suitable for interview as he clearly did not understand that he was participating in an evaluation and wanted the advice of the worker. I gave this last man the number and opening hours of the helpline and tried to be as clear as possible that I was not a member of staff who could help him. Of the remaining 5, all were called from a variety of landlines and mobiles showing the numbers the numbers, in order to reduce the chance that the calls were refused because the number was withheld. Some had been very specific about when they wanted to call, which meant that the opportunities to try them were very limited. All were called at least 4 times and unless indicated otherwise, at a variety of times of day.

This excluded the following:

- People who changed their mind about the interview
- People who had given a false or wrong number
- People who could not be interviewed safely
- People who could not be contacted.

From the statistics kept by the helpline about callers it appears that professionals are severely under-represented in this sample – it was not clear how many had given permission but none were interviewed. Unsafe, unsatisfied and quick callers are under-represented in the sample;

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1. Professionals are under-represented in this sample;
2. Non-white callers are over-represented in this sample;
3. Gay men are under-represented in this sample, given the probability that they form a significant minority of all male victims of domestic violence;
4. It is not possible to say whether victims and perpetrators are representative in the sample of the numbers calling the helpline.

III FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION

3.1 Source of information about the helpline

FINDING

The most common source of information about the Men's Advice Line is the internet.

how did you find out about the helpline?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	web search	7	31.8	33.3	33.3
	partner/ex	1	4.5	4.8	38.1
	Women's Aid	3	13.6	14.3	52.4
	police	4	18.2	19.0	71.4
	other	6	27.3	28.6	100.0
	Total	21	95.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.5		
Total		22	100.0		

Of those who answered "other" the responses were: "mate's wife" (1), Respect Phonenumber (1), Hospital poster (1), local authority (1) and legal advisor (1).

Those who had called Women's Aid first were not surprised to be given another number to call. There was one caller who felt that the services should be combined but most of the rest of the callers specified the fact that it was a specialist service for men as a benefit for them.

3.2 Reason for calling - who are the callers?

Men had a range of reasons for calling. Some were explicitly about domestic violence:

"I wanted some advice about domestic violence and how to deal with it – I just wanted to talk to someone who would understand"

"My marriage ended 8 years ago, it was very abusive, both mental and physical abuse and it is affecting my other relationships"

"Me and my partner just split up. She accused me of abusing her, I thought she was abusing me. I found out she was having an affair so I went round to see her and she punched me"

"I wanted legal advice about an ongoing assault case, my wife was arrested for abusing me in November 2007"

Some were less specific to domestic violence and did not refer to violence or abuse throughout the phone interview:

"I was having a few problems in my marriage"

"I just had a messy divorce and need advice about children and courts"

It was impossible to tell in 7 cases whether or not the caller had been the victim of domestic violence – they may have not wanted to say anything about the abuse but at least four gave me the impression that their call was not related to abuse at all. This does not mean that the service was not relevant for them – it is entirely possible that they simply didn't want to be explicit with me and perhaps not even with the worker. During the interview with the helpline worker he said that this does happen sometimes, but also that in some cases it is difficult to tell if the person is definitely NOT a victim.

Some gave the impression right from the start that they were probably also using violence against their partner:

"My partner is violent and I have to defend myself by restraining her. She says she'll call the police and tell them I'm abusing her. After a while you start to think you might as well do the things she's accusing you of, so...but it's not fair, the police will always take her side. She will always win"

This particular man said he had obtained the number for the Men's Advice Line from the Respect Phonenumber so it is likely that at some point he has identified or been identified as a perpetrator but that the service found it difficult to categorise him as sole perpetrator and so gave him this number.

At least four other men interviewed described incidents in which it appeared to me that the boundaries between being a victim and being a perpetrator were not clear but the interviewee seemed to focus on victim status from being, as they saw it, wrongly accused of something:

"I'm a victim of the legal system, my relationship was so bad that I took our son to the park and I said to her, don't be surprised if you see us both hanging from a tree and this got reported to social services as me threatening to kill my son"

"I've got one child accusing me of excessive chastisement and no-one in social services believes me"

This sense of victimisation because of their partner's or an agency's use of the legal system is something echoed in other current evaluations of work with male victims (Coulter, pending, from a speech made at a conference in May 2008). The small numbers in this evaluation should therefore be seen as part of a developing picture of the differences and similarities between men and women who identify as victims of domestic violence.

The workers in both the Men's Advice Line and the Respect Phonenumber services share information and approaches to working with victims and perpetrators and discuss the challenges of knowing how to approach someone who may be in either category or both. This relationship is clearly of benefit:

"I've picked up a lot from Clare [Respect Phonenumber worker] and have ways of challenging and asking questions about the way they describe an incident that sometimes help someone to realise that they have been violent too...I can and do tell them that they shouldn't use violence and that if necessary they need to remove themselves from the situation if they think that they are going to use violence...I use phrases like 'that sounds to me like you were also being really

scary to your wife, what do you think about that? ...and other things I have found to be useful, I have various phrases I use regularly...sometimes I can get them to the point where they will consider ringing the Respect Phonenumber but not always of course” [interview with Men's Advice Line worker]

The close relationship between the two services is a discernible benefit for clients directly, in that the workers in both services are able to benefit from each others' service and knowledge in their interactions with clients, and to the workers themselves, as they know that they can confidently refer a client to the other service knowing what they will receive and that it will be useful. This helps both services to protect and support both male and female victims of domestic violence.

FINDINGS

- Men who call the Men's Advice Line are sometimes clearly identified primary or sole victims of domestic violence from a female partner.
- Some callers appear to be a mixture of perpetrator and victim.
- In some cases, it seems likely that the caller is perpetrator rather than victim.
- In these cases and in general, the close working relationships between the Men's Advice Line and the Respect Phonenumber benefits the service, helps male and female victims and helps the staff in both services to respond effectively.

3.3 Administrative handling of the call

The majority of callers interviewed got through to speak to a worker first time. 13 callers got through to the worker on the first time they rang (59%) and of the 6 who didn't and left a message, 5 (22.7%) were rung back by the worker within 2 days. This means that 81.7% were definitely either answered first time or called back within 2 working days.

I observed the helpline worker answering calls promptly and politely and giving clear brief information about the nature and purpose of the service. All the callers interviewed appeared to understand the nature of the service.

FINDINGS

Calls are answered promptly and the caller is given clear brief information about the nature and purpose of the service, as required by the model of work.

81.7% of callers interviewed were either answered first time or were called back within two working days of leaving a message, which is the aim of the model of work.

3.4 Content of calls

Content of calls can and does vary enormously according to the needs, situation and inclinations of the caller. I observed the helpline staff respond to calls efficiently and effectively, working rapidly and with skill to establish the reasons for the call and to create sufficient rapport with callers to be able to respond to complex situations and a range of needs. In many cases this was a short process, particularly when the caller simply wanted a phone number for a local programme and did not need any further information or discussion. In many other cases, the rapport required is for sustaining what can be a difficult and challenging conversation for the caller. If perpetrators have called, they may state that they want to change their behaviour, but in practice they often minimise or deny what they have done or blame someone else for it. Content of calls therefore includes:

- Establishing the purpose of call
- Identifying if the caller is safe to talk and if so, if there are likely to be any interruptions
- Discussing history of violence
- Identifying possible options for further action, including brief information about legal protection and safety strategies
- Discussing how these options might work
- If the caller appeared to be a perpetrator, carefully challenging minimisation, denial and blame, whilst maintaining engagement if possible and also being mindful of need not to increase aggression in callers; referring these callers if possible to the Respect Phonenumber for perpetrators of domestic violence
- Discussing what is meant by domestic violence

Data from interviews and from observation of calls confirms that this range of content occurred during calls with these callers.

I observed the helpline worker managing the time of calls well. Although I could not hear the caller, the worker appeared to be listening well to specific requests and answering them whenever he could. If he couldn't provide a specific piece of information he explained briefly why and attempted to provide other helpful information. He brought calls to an end gently and appropriately. Callers interviewed said that the worker gave them time to talk:

"I didn't feel rushed, he listened and asked me helpful questions"

Sometimes there are gaps between calls, which the worker uses to answer emails or to call back people who have left messages on the answerphone if necessary.

The helpline worker uses good listening and communication skills during the calls, which I both witnessed and heard about from interviewees. He often asks about the most recent incident of domestic violence, using simple prompts and reflective statements to encourage the caller to talk. This helps him to help the caller to reflect on what has happened in order to give clear messages about the unacceptability of domestic violence. It helps him to identify safety strategies they may be using and highlight safer ones or recommend avoiding dangerous or abusive ones. It also helps him to identify callers who may be using violence

themselves and to encourage them to reflect on this as well. See below in section 3.6.3 for further discussion of this technique.

I heard the helpline worker giving clear information about the legal status of domestic violence to two callers. Interviewees also described legal information they had been given which was accurate and relevant.

“he told me that I had the right to have legal protection”

“he told me that I have rights to apply for contact with my children and should talk to a solicitor”

FINDINGS

- Calls vary in length and content. The helpline worker manages time well, bringing calls to a close appropriately but without making calls feel rushed.
- A range of subjects and discussions can and often does take place during calls, corresponding to the model of work
- The worker usually asks the caller about the most recent incident of abuse.
- Discussions about recent incidents of abuse allow the worker to provide safety advice that relates directly to the caller.
- Discussions about recent incidents of abuse also allow the worker to identify any abusive behaviour the caller may have used and to reflect that to the caller in ways that allow them to start to identify where their own behaviour is abusive.
- Discussions about recent incidents of abuse also allow the worker to give clear messages about the unacceptability of abuse, that abuse is the responsibility of the person using it and that victims have a right to be safe and protected.
- Key information about legal rights and safety strategies is given when appropriate

3.6 Quality of calls

3.6.1 Manner of call handling

FINDING

The Men's Advice Line worker is clear, polite and respectful as per the model of work.

I observed the worker taking calls clearly and courteously, using excellent communication and (apparently) listening skills, reflecting or challenging when appropriate but also always respectful, even when challenging or disagreeing with the caller. The callers interviewed said

that they felt listened to well (see later) and none gave examples of incidents during calls when they felt that the worker was disrespectful.

3.6.2 Understanding

FINDING

The helpline worker uses high levels of understanding of the nature and effects of domestic violence in order to respond appropriately to callers.

Callers had positive views of the worker's understanding of domestic violence.

"I felt he really understood my situation"

"he seemed to know as much about me as I did"

"it wasn't making sense but Simon helped me to understand more what was going on and that it wasn't my fault, by talking through something that had happened recently"

Observation of the helpline worker and an interview with him strongly demonstrated his understanding of domestic violence in general, domestic violence as it might affect male victims and of the ways in which male victims may also have used violence against their partners. He also demonstrated a good understanding of the basic framework of legal rights to domestic violence, which the callers appreciated:

"I know he's not a lawyer but I just wanted to get some clear information about my rights and he was able to tell me that what's been happening to me is illegal"

3.6.3 Reflection and careful challenging

FINDINGS

The clear model of work helps to focus the nature and purposes of the service.

Reflection is used to help victims understand that they are entitled not to be abused.

Reflection and careful challenging or questioning are also used to help suspected perpetrators understand that violence is never acceptable and that they should not be using it.

I observed the helpline worker using various techniques to help callers to deepen their understanding of their own situation. He also described others he uses:

"that sounds pretty frightening, can you tell me a bit more?"

"well, it's never OK for someone to use violence or abuse in a relationship – what do you think about that?"

“from what you’re saying it seems to me as if you are also using violence and I think you would benefit from getting some help with that – how do you feel about that?”

The helpline worker is clearly skilled at using reflection and questioning in calls including calls with distressed or angry men, in order to promote safety.

3.6.4 Stimulating action

FINDING

Many victims of domestic violence are stimulated to take action they had not considered before

At the time of the initial interview, two thirds of the interviewees said that they had already taken action as a result of the call to the helpline.

Have you taken any action as result of call?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	yes	14	63.6	73.7
	no	3	13.6	15.8
	not sure	2	9.1	10.5
	Total	19	86.4	100.0
Missing	System	3	13.6	
Total		22	100.0	

In follow up interviews with 5 callers, all 5 had taken some further action as a result of the call since the time of the initial interview. The common actions are explored more in section 3.10.

Given that there are very limited numbers of specialist services for male victims to refer clients onto and also given the common misconception, referred to by three interviewees in this evaluation, that legal rights are not available to male victims, it is encouraging to see such a proportion of callers who felt that the call to the helpline had prompted them to take action. Whilst it is important to stress that the numbers in this evaluation

3.7 Satisfaction with call

Interviewees were asked to rate how well they felt they were listened to, on a scale of 1 (not listened to well at all) to 5 (listened to really well). 90.9%(9 out of 10) rated the worker's listening as 4 or 5.

How well were you listened to?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	4.5	4.8	4.8
	4	6	27.3	28.6	33.3

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	5	14	63.6	66.7	100.0
	Total	21	95.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	4.5		
Total		22	100.0		

Interviewees were then asked to rate how satisfied they were with the call overall, on a scale of 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). 68.2% (two out of three) scored overall satisfaction at 4 or 5.

How satisfied were you?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	3	6	27.3	28.6
	4	5	22.7	23.8
	5	10	45.5	47.6
	Total	21	95.5	100.0
Missing	System	1	4.5	
Total		22	100.0	

Some callers felt that they had some needs which had not been met by the call. This does not necessarily mean that these needs were reasonable or within the model of work.

What else would you have liked?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	other	10	45.5	58.8
	nothing	7	31.8	41.2
	Total	17	77.3	100.0
Missing	System	5	22.7	
Total		22	100.0	

The range of responses under "other" included:

- Longer opening hours or quicker response or freephone¹ or combination of these(4)
- Housing (1)
- Legal advice or more legal advice (3)

3.8 Gender of the worker

The gender of the helpline worker was only mentioned specifically by one interviewee, who said that:

¹ The Men's Advice Line number is free from landlines and most mobiles

"I tend to prefer talking to women, so it was a bit uncomfortable at first, but Simon made me feel really at ease"

This may be because the interviewees were expecting a male helpline worker in the first place and so took it for granted. No specific questions were asked about the gender of the worker.

3.9 Suggestions for development

3.8.2 Opening hours

I found that about half of the men who volunteered for interview could not be interviewed easily during office hours and some said that they could not talk about this whilst they are at work. I interviewed them in the evenings or in one case early in the morning. Most could be contacted by 7.30pm. Of these men, four commented that they would have liked opening hours for the helpline that accommodated this problem

"I can't take a call like this at work and I was scared to leave a message in case they [Men's Advice Line] called me back whilst I was at work"

This data is not sufficient to draw generalised conclusions from nor is it strong enough to make a clear recommendation that the hours should be extended forthwith. It is likely that many men would not call during the evenings for other reasons, particularly if they are still living with their partner:

"make sure you don't call after 6pm, it won't be private – call me at work and give me a minute to find a quiet corner" [initial contact phone call with one interviewee]

However, it may be worth considering an extension for a trial period of one evening per week, to 8pm only.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Men's Advice Line considers extending the opening hours for one night per week to 8pm for a trial period to see if this helps callers who can't ring during office hours.

3.9 Impact of calls

FINDING

Most callers interviewed felt better at the end of the call than they did at the beginning.

how did you feel at the end of the call?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	improved state of mind	18	81.8	90.0	90.0
	same state of mind	2	9.1	10.0	100.0

Total	20	90.9	100.0
Missing System	2	9.1	
Total	22	100.0	

The improved state of mind includes several who described themselves as “very upset” at the start of the call.

One man said that at the start of the call:

“I can’t describe how I felt at that point, quite powerless, awful...”

But that by the end of the call:

“he [advice line worker] had made me feel much better”

Another describe his feelings before as:

“pretty bad”

And after as:

“inspired and relieved”

7 men, whilst saying that they did feel better by the end of the call, were a little more restrained about the extent of this improvement:

“I felt a bit better”

“I felt slightly reassured but still upset”

Of course one call to the Men’s Advice Line cannot change the situations of every caller and some problems are beyond the scope of this service. Callers may also have lived with abuse or upset for some time or be facing severe changes in their lives such as no longer living with their children. It is not surprising that callers are guarded in their expressions of improvements in their lives after one call to the advice line.

5 men said that they felt safer as a result of the call to the helpline. These men had all been given reassurance that it wasn’t acceptable for someone to abuse them and 2 of them had had legal advice.

3.10 Actions taken as a result of the call

FINDING

The most common reported action taken as a result of the call to the Men’s Advice Line is to seek legal advice from a solicitor about either protection from abuse or about disputes about children.

Most of the callers interviewed took some action as a result of the call to the phone line. The most common form of action was consulting a solicitor (6 men, 27.3%) or another agency or organisation (a further 3 men). In at least two cases it appeared to me during the interview

that it was strongly possible that these men were presenting as victims to the service in order to get information about family proceedings which they could then use against their partner, when they were actually not victims. Of course I cannot know this for sure and neither can the advice line. In any case, these men could presumably have found this information elsewhere and of course the staff will have to give such advice to male victims. There are dilemmas involved in responding to male and female victims and perpetrators on phone lines, in group work and in individual support – workers can never know exactly how something is going to be interpreted or used by the client. However, they can use their specialist knowledge to be aware of the risks and warning signs. Having observed the helpline worker in action and having talked to him and to the co-ordinator and the Male Victims Worker who also takes calls on the helpline, about some of the dilemmas they face responding to ambiguous callers, I feel reassured that the staff involved in the helpline have sufficient understanding of the complexities to recognise these dangers. Indeed, the helpline worker stated them explicitly unprompted. I also feel that the supervision and line management provided help to ensure that the focus on safety of victims is maintained.

3.11 Domestic violence services for men

FINDINGS

None of the men interviewed said that they had wanted a specialist refuge or similar local service for male victims of domestic violence.

Some stated that it was helpful to have this specific service for men.

There was a mixture of views expressed about specific service or about the specific impacts of domestic violence on men. One caller said that he rang the helpline because he wanted to have details of a local counsellor who had some understanding of the impact of domestic violence on men. He said that he had been provided with this information by the helpline worker and that this was very helpful. Three callers stated that they believed that legal rights were not enforced for men but that they had been given helpful information about these legal rights by the helpline worker. One caller expressed the views expressed by others:

“it’s good to know that there’s something specifically for men who are affected by domestic violence – you hear about services for women and it’s good that men have something too”

There are insufficient numbers in this evaluation to make generalised observations about the specific needs of male victims.

3.11 Adherence to model of work

Interviews with callers, interviews with staff and observation of some calls strongly suggests that the staff are adhering to the model of work and using great skill and understanding to do this.

FINDINGS

The Men's Advice Line appears to be operating according to the model of work

The skills, experience and knowledge needed to operate according to that model of work are considerable and very specific to the service and a generic service is unlikely to be able to provide the specialist support required by callers.

There is no other equivalent service for all male victims or others needing help about male victims. There are specialist helplines for gay men affected by domestic violence, which perhaps explains why no gay men appeared to be in this sample.

The model of work is supported by the very clear line that perpetrators are 100% responsible for their own abusive behaviour and that they alone have responsibility to change. This clear approach helps the worker to support victims clearly and also to help suspected perpetrators to identify their own behaviour as problematic and occasionally to seek help for that. Without the specialist skills and the close links between the Men's Advice Line, the Respect Male Victims worker and the Respect Phoneline for perpetrators, it would be difficult or impossible to engage perpetrators in taking steps to change their behaviour.

3.12 Skills and experience of staff

Staff were observed using specific knowledge and experience which is essential to meeting the model of work:

1. Knowledge of basic legal responses to perpetrators and victims (although victims can and should obtain further detailed legal advice if they want to take legal action, if this is the line they have called about the abusive behaviour, the knowledge is vital, in case they do not call anyone else and in order to give a clear picture of the likelihood of change)
2. Skills of identifying possible perpetrators presenting as victims and of using careful challenges and enquiring statements to encourage the caller to review their status and consider calling the Respect Phoneline. Whilst this level of work with perpetrators is not as comprehensive as that in use in the Respect Phoneline it appears from observation and from interviews with staff that the main helpline worker has considerable skill in this. It is particularly challenging to be responding to someone who is explicitly describing themselves as a primary victim but who is presenting as at least mutually violent.
3. Skilled line management and clinical supervision from individuals with a good understanding of the range of ways perpetrators may manipulate the discussion and how to manage this without collusion or creating additional risks for victims are crucial elements of staff management for this service.

IV Conclusions

The services provided by the Men's Advice Line appear to be following the model of work.

Staff are using considerable specialist skills and knowledge to meet the needs of male victims of domestic violence. These skills are partly supported and developed by close working

relationships between the Men's Advice Line and the Respect Phoneline and also by clinical supervision and line management from within Respect.

The ethnic breakdown of the men interviewed for this evaluation suggests that the callers are representative of the ethnic makeup of the UK. Gay men appear to be under-represented but this is likely to be because of the availability of other specialist services for this client group provided by gay men's organisations or other specialist services.

Opening hours are not sufficient to offer a service for men who cannot call during office hours, however, some men who work do call and use the service nevertheless. It may be worth exploring offering an evening session to gauge demand for and use of this facility.

Callers interviewed were satisfied with the service they had received. Most took some form of action as a result of the call and some said that they felt safer as a result. Callers felt listened to and reassured that domestic violence was not acceptable.

The helpline worker gives clear accurate information about rights and services and uses communication skills effectively to manage calls appropriately and with empathy and respect. He also uses considerable depths of understanding to be able to interpret the complexities of the situations callers may be in and to respond to these effectively, prioritising the safety of victims and maintaining a focus on this.

From the available data gathered in this evaluation it would appear that having a specialist service for male victims is worthwhile and that it is well placed in its current organisational setting.

The work is complex, specialist and skilled. I commend the whole team and particularly the worker who was taking the majority of the calls during this evaluation, for the commitment and energy they have put into making this service a success.

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