

SCOTLAND'S DOMESTIC ABUSE & FORCED MARRIAGE HELPLINE ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018





We would like to thank everyone who has made a contribution to the Helpline over the last year and supported its development. Particular thanks go to Respect, for their work on the men's helpline and to the Scottish Government for funding the SDAFMH.



INTRODUCTION

This has been the second year for Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline. Call volume has increased by 34% on the previous year, and we have developed some important new partnerships that mean the Helpline has a greater reach than ever before.

The Helpline is managed by Scottish Women's Aid and we are partnered with Respect*. We provide confidential support 24/7 for 365 days a year to anyone with experience of domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as family members, friends, colleagues and the professionals who support them.

Working on the Helpline can be both challenging and rewarding. The experience of handling calls is directly channelled into improving access and thinking about ways that we can seamlessly refer people to local services that will provide specialist support.

Everyone who works for us prides themselves on the help we provide and in knowing that anyone who calls us will receive the best possible service. While we encourage and welcome feedback, when the caller hangs up, that is often the last we hear from them. And that can be very hard.

This year provided us with an exception. One of our call handlers was given a unique opportunity to meet a woman whose call she had answered almost two years ago. We are grateful to both women for allowing us to include their stories in this year's annual report. It serves as an important reminder that while the help we provide is often life changing, it can also be life saving.

We hope this gives you an insight into why the Helpline exists, who calls us and what it is like to be the first point of contact for many. Our work is vitally important, and it is just as important that we share it as widely as we can.

Lydia Okroj
Helpline Manager

*Calls from men are transferred to the Men's Advice Line, run by Respect, between the hours of 9-5 Monday to Friday



RACHAEL'S STORY

A simple article about gaslighting – a kind of emotional abuse where the abusive partner manipulates you into doubting your own sanity and version of events – switched all the lights onto my relationship. For some time I hadn't been able to pinpoint what was happening, something didn't feel right but I thought I was to blame. With this new understanding I realised that maybe something more sinister was happening.

Lost for words but needing to speak to someone, I called Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline from an Italian roadside 1,200 miles away. Erica answered. Though I didn't know what to say, or how to start, she encouraged and supported me to explain why I was calling and what was happening, bringing my experiences and fears into focus.

In a situation where everything feels so chaotic and overwhelming, where you doubt even your own sanity, having that sense check and experienced hand on the other end of the line is everything. It's clarity. It's a lifeline that connects you to the real world - a place that you then know still exists beyond your relationship. It's a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel – hope – and that's what I decided to follow.

Making the decision to leave was not easy. Neither were the practical steps I took to get out safely. Thankfully, Erica's experience and empathy gave me the support I needed to flee. It was the practical things, the things you wouldn't think about: making sure I knew where my passport was, doing a full grocery shop and booking tickets to an event in advance to throw my former partner off my trail. Taking this little bit of the power back gave me much more courage.

 **You might not have the words, or be able to put all of the pieces together right away, but take the step, call the Helpline.**

Waiting to leave was terrifying. It was without a doubt the scariest and hardest thing I have ever done. It's really not an overstatement to say that Erica's experience, resourcefulness and genuine concern saved my life - both helping me to see my relationship with clarity and supporting me through practical steps to safety.

Sadly my experience is not that unique. Of course not all calls are made from an Italian roadside, but the Helpline supports thousands of people like me. Had I not stumbled upon that article by chance, it might have been much longer before I realised how unhealthy my relationship was. Had I not had the support from the Helpline and Erica, my story might have been very different, I might never have left at all.

For others who find themselves in a similar situation to me I would say, trust yourself and your intuition. If you feel that something isn't right, listen to your gut. You might not have the words, or be able to put all of the pieces together right away, but take the step, call the Helpline.

The team are incredible, they have the knowledge and experience to help you make sense of your situation, and the practical support to help you take the safest actions for you and your family. They understand and they genuinely care.



HOW MANY PEOPLE CONTACTED THE HELPLINE?

This report summarises the information we received from **2554** contacts.

In total, our call handlers dealt with **4252** people. Most of the contacts were made by phone, but there were **204** emails. The term 'call' is used here to refer to both types of contact for the sake of clarity*.

There were **76%** calling us about their own circumstances, while **17%** were concerned about friends or family members. A final **6%** were people from other services or organisations who were seeking information on behalf of an individual or who wanted to improve their own understanding about domestic abuse or forced marriage.

We are Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline, but received **90** calls from England, **three** from Wales and **five** from Northern Ireland. There were even **14** international calls.

Most of the contacts from within Scotland came from **Edinburgh** and **Glasgow**. Individuals from as far afield as **Shetland**, **Orkney** and the **Western Isles** also asked for help.

OUR CALLERS SAID...
You've no idea how much it means that you believe me

Hello, I need your help. I'm worried for my daughter.



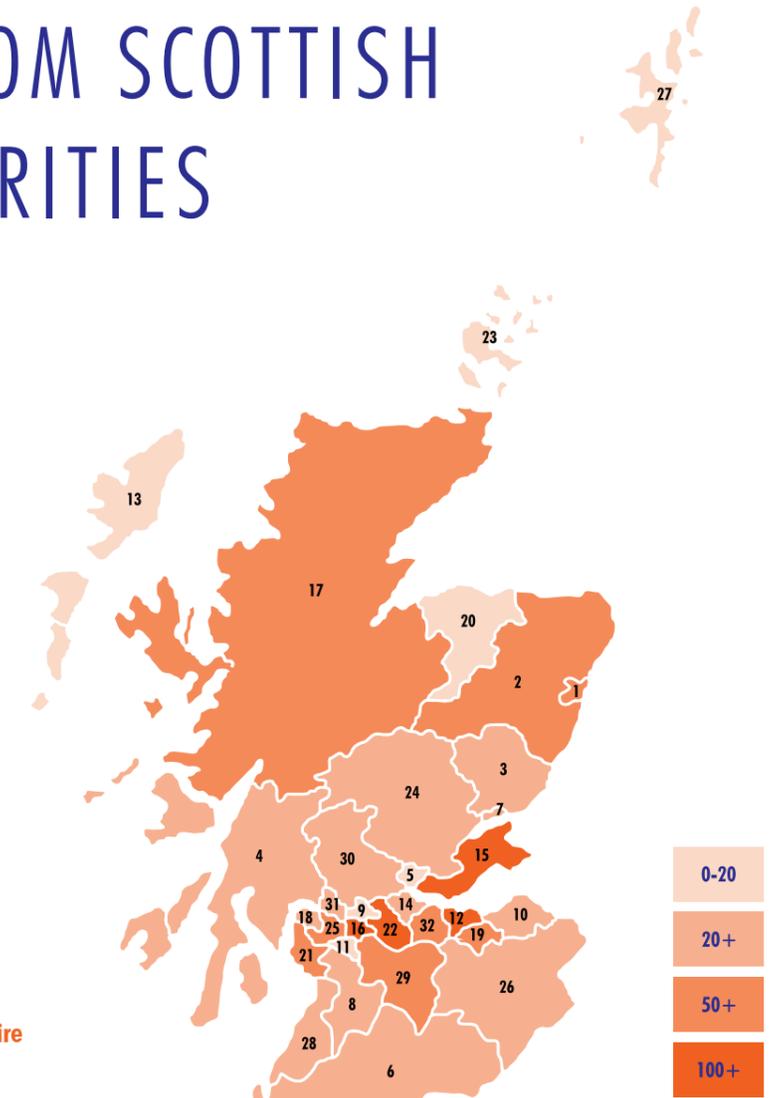
4252

CONTACTS: APRIL 2017 - MARCH 2018

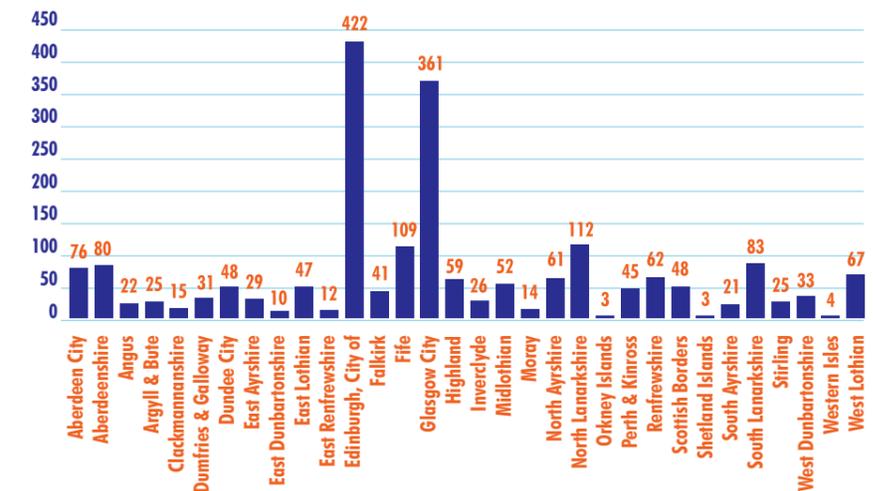
*We will use the term 'caller' to represent all contacts; whether telephone or email throughout the rest of this report.

NUMBERS FROM SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Aberdeen City | 17 Highland |
| 2 Aberdeenshire | 18 Inverclyde |
| 3 Angus | 19 Midlothian |
| 4 Argyll & Bute | 20 Moray |
| 5 Clackmannanshire | 21 North Ayrshire |
| 6 Dumfries & Galloway | 22 North Lanarkshire |
| 7 Dundee City | 23 Orkney Islands |
| 8 East Ayrshire | 24 Perth & Kinross |
| 9 East Dunbartonshire | 25 Renfrewshire |
| 10 East Lothian | 26 Scottish Borders |
| 11 East Renfrewshire | 27 Shetland Islands |
| 12 Edinburgh, City of | 28 South Ayrshire |
| 13 Western Isles | 29 South Lanarkshire |
| 14 Falkirk | 30 Stirling |
| 15 Fife | 31 West Dunbartonshire |
| 16 Glasgow City | 32 West Lothian |



Number of contacts from Scottish Local Authorities (N=2046)¹

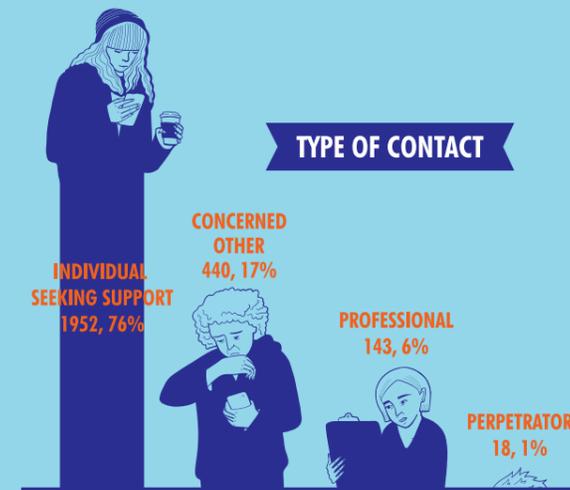
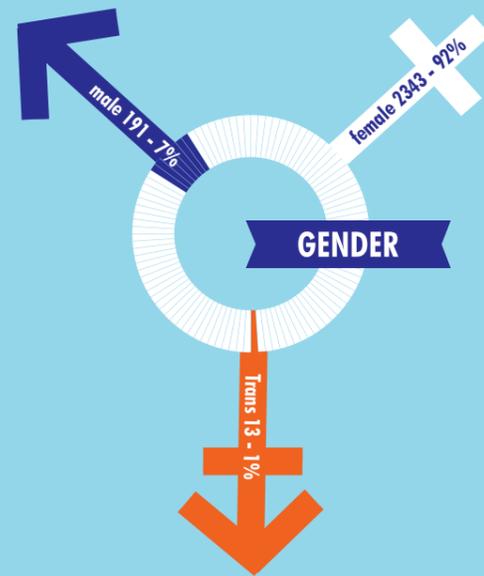


1. Throughout the report, "N" is the total number of contacts about whom we were able to collect the information.

WHO CONTACTED THE HELPLINE?

The majority of our contacts **92%** were women seeking support; **7%** were men and **1%** identified as transgender.

'Concerned others' refers to family, friends and colleagues looking for information and accounted for **17%** of all our calls. Many of these callers want more information to help them understand what is happening, what services are available and how to provide the best support they can.



Less than **1%** of our calls came from perpetrators. There were **58%** of callers who identified as Scottish, a further **13%** described themselves as British, **3%** described themselves as Pakistani and **2%** as Polish, while the remaining **24%** of callers identified as being from other ethnic backgrounds.

Just over **1200** callers told us their age. Most were between **25** and **44**, with an average age of **38**. The youngest caller was **11**, the oldest **89**.

The **11** year old was looking for support on behalf of her mum, whose first language is not English. We were able to arrange a conference call where we put her in touch with the relevant agency.

CALLER AGE RANGE

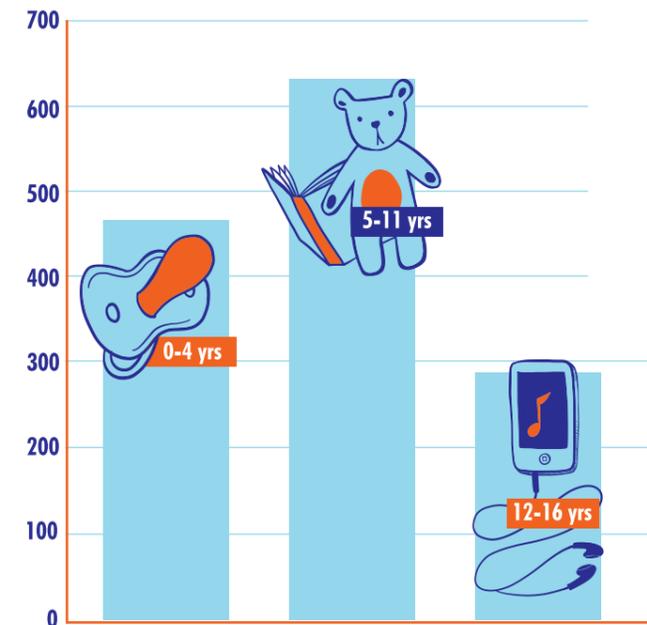
N = 1210



Our oldest caller was experiencing abuse from her son. We were able to signpost her to Action on Elder Abuse. Family abuse accounts for around **5%** of calls and is an area where there are few support agencies available, particularly where the victim is not elderly. Coupled with many callers' reluctance to involve the police, this can make providing support particularly difficult.

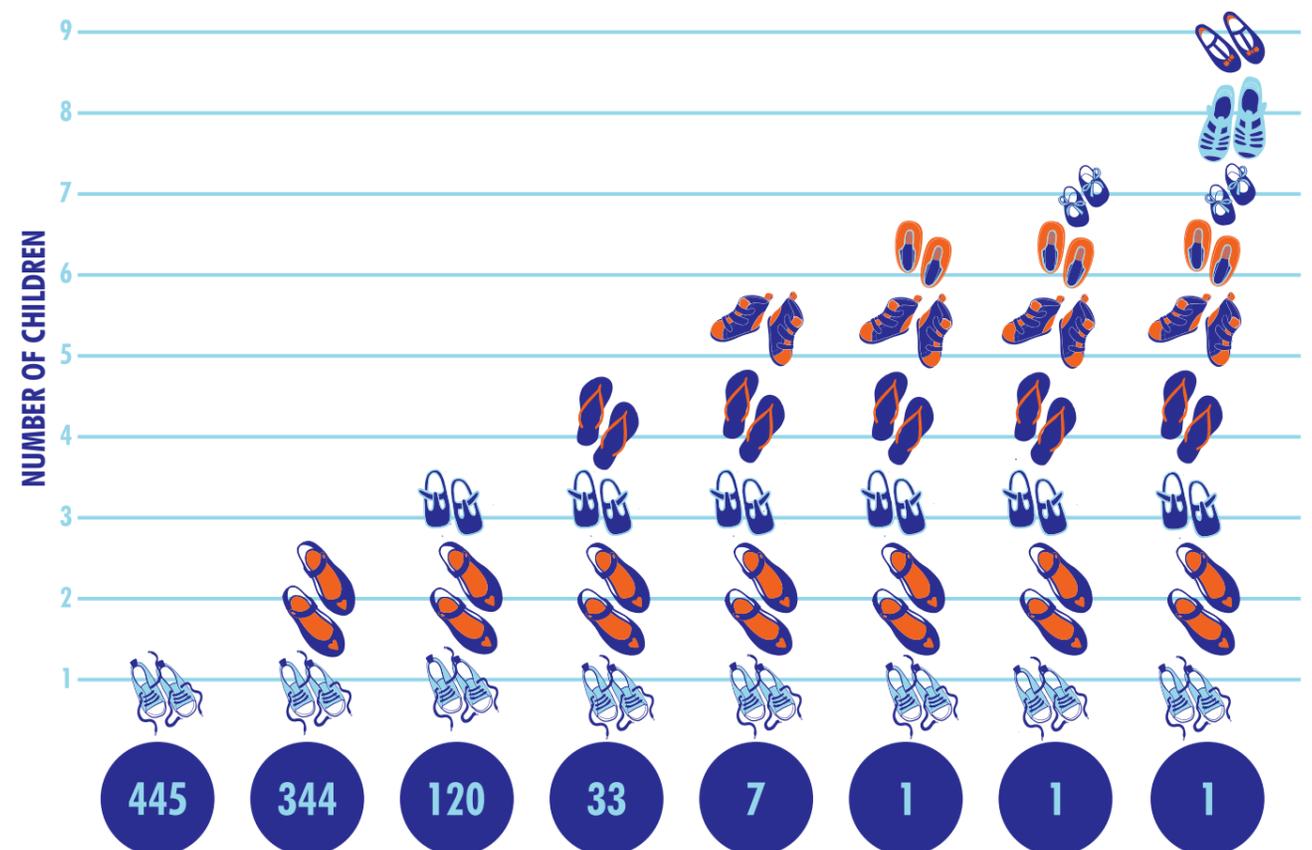
CALLERS' CHILDREN

OUR CALLERS SAID...
I don't feel like I'm going mad anymore



Children played a part in a significant number of calls. There were **1795** callers who provided information about the number of children they had. **952** or **53%** had at least **one** child. Of those callers, **816** told us about their children's ages, which ranged from **less than one month** to **15** years. Most were **under 12**.

Please note: We only record children's ages if they are **under 16**.



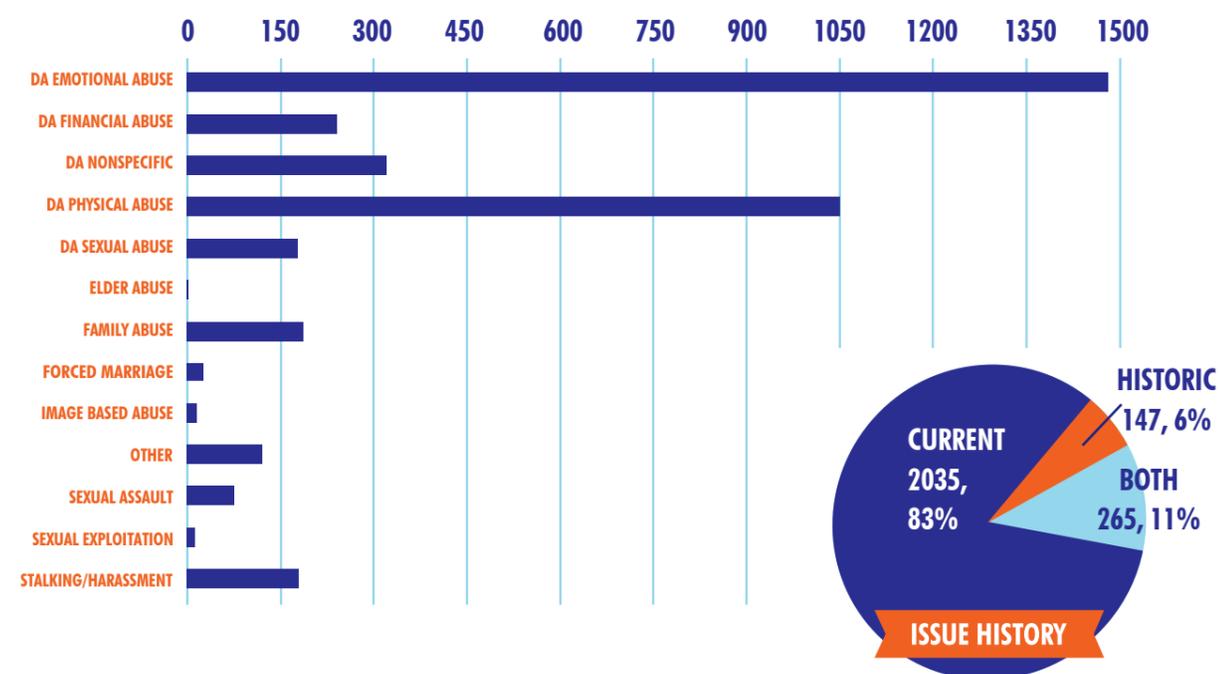
WHAT DID PEOPLE CALL THE HELPLINE ABOUT?

Our call handlers only gathered information about the types of abuse that callers were experiencing where it was appropriate to do so. This included the type of abuse and whether it was current or historic.

There were **83%** of contacts that were about current abuse and **6%** were in relation to abuse that happened in the past. One in ten were currently experiencing abuse as well as the ongoing consequences of abuse that happened in the past.

Most of our callers were dealing with more than one type of abuse when they contacted the Helpline. The most frequent combination was emotional abuse coupled with another type of abuse. This reflects the complex, multifaceted nature of domestic abuse.

Elder abuse and sexual exploitation were the least likely issues to be mentioned by callers or addressed by our call handlers.



60% OF CALLS INVOLVED EMOTIONAL ABUSE



43% INVOLVED PHYSICAL ABUSE



27 CONTACTS WERE IN RELATION TO FORCED MARRIAGE

WHAT DID CALLERS WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

The two most common reasons for contacting the Helpline were to get information about Women's Aid services and for emotional support.

We work closely with local Women's Aid groups and have been developing a call diversion service that allows groups to automatically divert all their out of hours calls to the Helpline.

Housing was the main issue for a quarter of our contacts. Callers needed support with emergency accommodation but also temporary and permanent accommodation.

CALL HANDLER'S WORDS ON HOUSING ISSUES

"Housing can be a serious concern for people experiencing domestic abuse and this comes up as a main issue on many calls to the helpline. Some callers are looking for information about their rights in relation to their home, some are thinking about their options and may be worried about where they would stay if they left an abusive partner, and some have fled in an emergency and are in urgent need of a safe place to stay."



When someone contacts us about housing, we work to understand their individual circumstances and needs so we can provide them with tailored information. It is important to us that callers get the space to explore their options, ask any questions they may have, and feel able to make informed decisions."

OUR CALLERS SAID...
Thank you so much. I thought I was losing my mind, but I'm right!

MAIN ISSUE (N=2554)

1251	INFO RE: WA SERVICES
1155	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
501	LEGAL
373	OTHER
331	HOUSING (PERMANENT/TEMPORARY)
297	QUESTIONS ABOUT DA
256	SAFETY
192	EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION
127	REFUGE
62	CHILD PROTECTION
52	QUESTIONS ABOUT OTHER ABUSE (NOT DA)
22	CRISIS
20	ADULT PROTECTION

SCOTLAND'S DOMESTIC ABUSE AND FORCED MARRIAGE HELPLINE

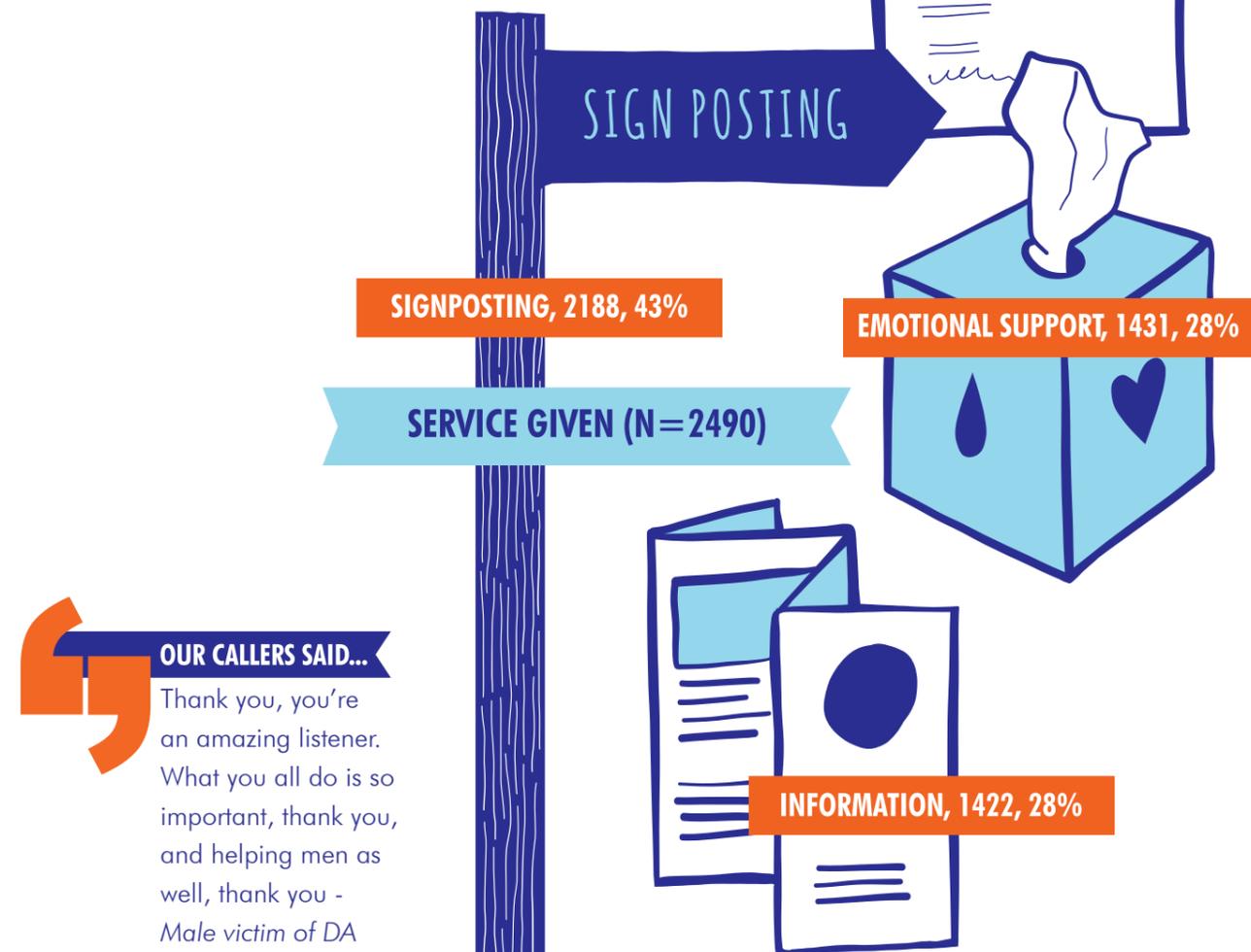


HOW DID WE SUPPORT OUR CALLERS?

Most of our callers were in need of emotional support, information about Women's Aid service, and general information about abuse or domestic abuse services. Call handlers signposted callers to relevant services, and provided emotional support.

Contacting a helpline about domestic abuse or forced marriage can be a very difficult step to take. It takes courage to do so. Our callers put their trust in us and confide about what can be a deeply sensitive and personal issue.

Working on the helpline is about providing a safe place to talk. That is a privilege and a responsibility that we take very seriously.



SOME OF THE SERVICES WE SIGNPOSTED TO INCLUDE:

- VIA NHS 24
- PET FOSTERING
- FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT
- DRINKLINE SHAKTI
- LAW SOCIETY SCOTLAND
- TRAUMA COUNSELLING
- LGBT HELPLINE
- SOCIAL WORK
- HEMAT GRYFFE
- VICTIM SUPPORT
- BREATHING SPACE
- ACTION ON ELDER ABUSE
- RAPE CRISIS
- LEGAL
- SILVERLINE
- MEN'S ADVICE LINE
- CHILD MAINTENANCE OPTIONS
- SCOTTISH CHILD LAW CENTRE
- SHELTER
- CHILDLINE
- POLICE
- REVENGE PORN HELPLINE
- ETHNIC MINORITIES LAW CENTRE
- CITIZEN'S ADVICE RESPECT
- SWRC
- FEARLESS SAHELIYA
- BRITISH EMBASSY
- WA
- ADVOCACY
- DEBTLINE
- SOLICITOR
- ASSIST SLAB
- GP
- EDDACS
- MIND
- HOUSING
- SAMARITANS NSPCC
- STALKING HELPLINE
- PARENTLINE
- CRUSE

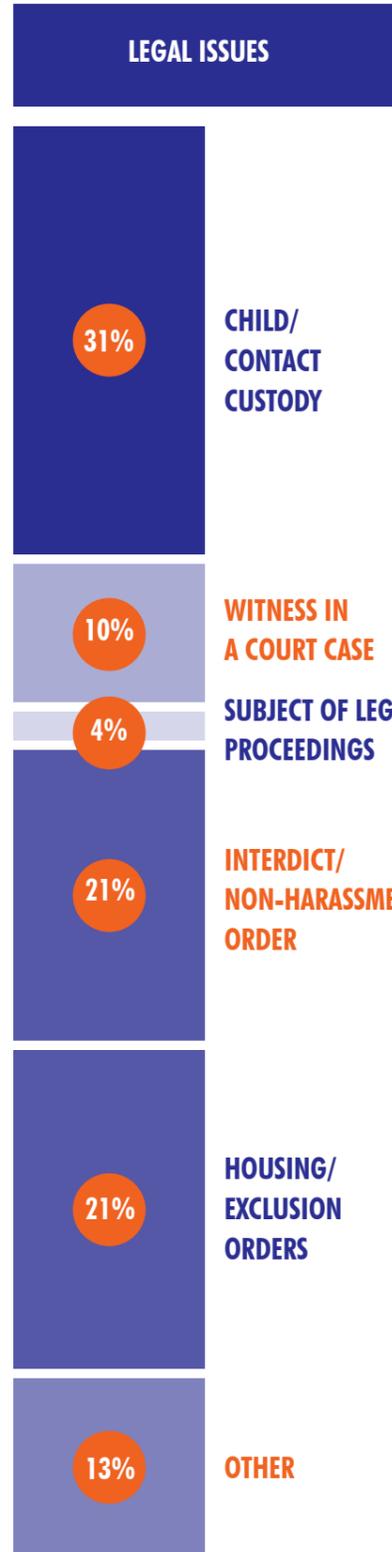
SUPPORT WITH LEGAL ISSUES

Call handlers record if the call has addressed any legal issues and the type of concern that has been discussed. This helps us to identify our callers' needs and make sure that training exists to help us to meet those needs.

Most frequently, callers are concerned about legal issues relating to child contact and custody arrangements. Overall, **31%** of calls related to legal issues concerning child contact and residence arrangements. This is a major concern and a source of distress for many of our callers. There are many characteristics of these calls:

- People are unsure as to how child contact agreements are formed
- Callers have often lost residence of their children to abusive partners or as a consequence of abuse
- Ex-partners can use child contact to continue manipulation, abuse and control. They may threaten to make false allegations about the caller's fitness to parent
- Sometimes callers feel frustrated that courts mandate contact when the children are not willing to see the abusive parent
- There may be concerns about the safety of their child during contact and fear that their child may be kidnapped, including being forcibly taken abroad

Women callers frequently feel unsupported and let down during legal proceedings. This is a major barrier to individuals engaging in civil or criminal processes. The Helpline frequently signposts these callers to organisations that provide specialist legal advice relating to domestic abuse and court support services.



OUR CALLERS SAID...
 "I feel more confident about my future"

WORKING ON THE HELPLINE



CALL HANDLER #1

'No two days are the same. Sometimes calls can be upsetting, and affect us on a personal level and in ways we wouldn't have expected. Our training allows us to set aside our own feelings and be there for the caller. We have excellent internal support to help process our feelings and look after our well-being. It is a caring and supportive environment, and that's important for what we do'

CALL HANDLER #2

'When someone experiencing domestic abuse is in acute distress and feels they have nowhere to go and no-one who cares, it's a privilege to answer the phone to them. Taking time, giving them space and asking the right questions in the right way and at the right time. When a caller says that they feel listened to, believed and hopeful for their future, we feel the benefit too'

WHAT CALLERS SAY

One of the comments our call handlers often hear is how often callers are relieved that they are believed. When someone is experiencing domestic abuse and coercive control, their abuser may make them feel like they are imagining it or that it is normal. In such situations, being believed and understood can be uniquely powerful.

I feel so much better after our chat. I'm stronger

Thank you for being such a good listener. I was feeling suicidal before I called
No-one else understands

You've been fabulous. You've changed my life

Thank you for talking to me. I thought I was having a breakdown before, but you've calmed me down

You've told me things that would never have occurred to me

Thank you for your kindness

You've calmed me down and I now know the options available

You have saved my life

It's so good to speak to someone who understands

Thank you for your time and patience. I feel better just for being listened to

I feel so much brighter and lighter

It feels so good to get some positive feedback for a change

The kindness and compassion you have shown me tonight has made such a difference



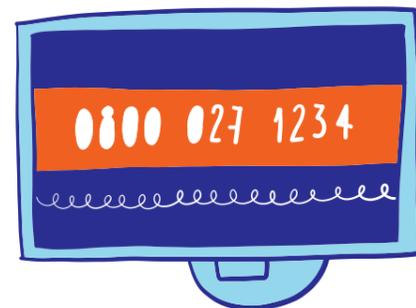
PROMOTING THE HELPLINE

The promotional work we carried out this year greatly improved the accessibility and viability of the Helpline. This work was helped by the appointment of an intern funded by the Conseil Regional de Bourgogne and the European Union.

An analysis of existing promotional material and the Helpline website resulted in some improvements to the text and the information provided. It resulted in a concerted effort to improve our Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) on Google, which led to a decision to change our name to Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline.

This has resulted in an improved average SEO ranking. We believe that this is directly linked to the 39% of people who accessed information via the internet, the highest percentage we have recorded.

Our posters and leaflet have been distributed across Scotland. We have posted them to every GP surgery, shared them with schools, distributed them to organisations in public buildings, provided them to Police Scotland and distributed them across the 36 Scottish Women's Aid groups.



SOCIAL MEDIA

The Helpline's presence continues to grow through the creation and development of innovative content including blogs, exclusive media features and social media promotion. The helpline graphic is often shared by high-profile Scottish figures with significant followings, including the First Minister of Scotland, reaching new audiences each day.

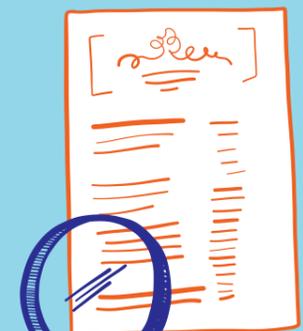
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Over the past two years, we have greatly increased our knowledge about how to run an effective helpline. We know more about who our callers are, what they are looking for, how best to provide support and how to maximise access to the service.

Over the next year we will:

- Introduce a web chat facility, opening another channel of communication and potentially reaching a younger demographic
- Increase our out of hours call diversion service for local groups
- Monitor the impact of the new domestic abuse legislation and the impact this will have on caller type and volume
- Expand our profile in the BME community
- Continue to build on our expertise and understanding of callers' needs
- Maintain and improve the quality of our service

We are excited about the developments and changes to come. Please contact us if you would like additional information on our work, or if you would like to discuss ways we can support your organisation in delivering services to those experiencing domestic abuse and forced marriage.



ERICA'S (CALL HANDLER) RESPONSE TO RACHAEL'S CALL.



We can never predict how a call will go. When the phone rings, we are in the dark. It could be a request for information, or it could be someone fearing for their life. But while the situations vary, most of the calls start the same: 'I'm not sure if this is the right place for me to call'.

Rachael's call was no exception. I noticed that the number was a long one, so it made sense that she was currently in Italy. She mentioned that she was Scottish and apologised if she was wasting our time. Abuse victims have often been undermined so much that they doubt themselves. The most important thing we can do is offer a safe space where they can talk about what they're going through without judgment. They want reassurance that it's okay to have called even if it isn't abuse. And most calls that start with minimising turn out to be people experiencing abuse.

I reassured Rachael that she could talk when she was ready. She told me about her partner and about her fears he was gaslighting her. As she shared, it became clear that his patterns of abuse went far beyond gaslighting. In fact, this felt like a life-threatening situation. And Rachael's decisiveness was amazing. She started the call questioning if her suspicions

were correct and ended it planning a last minute escape. After ending the call, I contacted the British consulate, only to find that they had been closed for years. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office offered little help. It was one automated service after another. This was a crisis situation and yet there was nobody for me to speak to.

I phoned Rachael back and gave her what little information I had. We then went into more in-depth safety planning. I advised her not to go back into the apartment without someone she trusted, and not to use her credit card for any charges that could give away her location once she left him. Then we talked through her options, including asking the police to escort her, while saying that we didn't know what their procedures were. Perhaps the staff at the airport could help her to a discreet location.

At the Helpline, we are often left wondering about what happened next. Callers rarely let us know. To eventually hear that Rachael had left her abusive partner and got out of Italy safely, and went on to create an organisation to help women in domestic crisis because of abuse is an extraordinary and priceless gift.



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