



SCOTLAND'S DOMESTIC ABUSE &
FORCED MARRIAGE HELPLINE
ANNUAL REPORT
2018-2019

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INTRODUCTION



This has been the busiest and most challenging year of managing Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline. But because it has been so challenging, it has also been the most rewarding.

Managed by Scottish Women's Aid and working in partnership with Respect*, our Helpline provides specialist, confidential support 24/7, 365 days a year to anyone with experience of domestic abuse or forced marriage and to family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them.

To meet callers' individual needs, we are constantly looking to increase access to the Helpline and to open pathways to local services that provide specialist support. Our experience of handling calls and feedback from callers informs all of our service developments. The Helpline team pride themselves on the quality of the support they provide and are confident in the knowledge that anyone who calls the Helpline will receive the best possible service.

Of the challenges, we responded to a significant rise in call volume which saw the daily call average increase from 12 to 18 calls

per day. We were additionally required to tender for the Scottish government contract to continue to provide the Helpline for the next five years. We also applied to the Helplines Partnership for Helplines Standards Accreditation.

Both our tender and our Helpline Standards Accreditation application were successful. The close of this year sees the Helpline facing a more secure future, and we were pleased that our call handlers' dedication and professionalism has been recognised more widely.

This report is a summary of the hard work that our staff have done over the past year. We hope that reading about that will give you an idea of our sense of achievement and our determination to continue providing the best service we can to those facing crisis.

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. Outside of these hours, they are answered by Helpline staff.

REFLECTING ON OUR WORK

This was the third and final year of our contract with the Scottish government, and it feels appropriate to reflect on what we have achieved over that period of time. This includes what we are doing well, but also where we can improve and where there are gaps in our services.

There have been two significant drivers for this work:

- compete in a tendering process in order to continue to receive funding from the Scottish government for the Helpline
- achieve the Helplines Standard, a nationally recognised quality accreditation for best practice in helpline work

The Helpline tender was announced in August 2018. This gave us less than six weeks to complete the process of making a case for further funding. Unlike the previous tender, however, we were able to draw on three years' experience of managing the Helpline.

Preparing the tender allowed us to recognise the amount and quality of work that we had completed in building the service from nothing. A range of comprehensive policies and procedures, support tools and systems are now in place to support our work.

In addition we:

- developed a bespoke database to support data collection and service planning
- gathered information on legal issues to better understand the needs of callers and inform policy developments
- introduced a 'warm' referral system, where callers can choose to be passed to a service they have been signposted to. This avoids delay in accessing services

The tender process highlighted that web chat was a service that was missing from the Helpline. In November 2018, we started looking at how we could incorporate this.

We were delighted when we were awarded the contract in December 2018. The award was initially for two years but with three, one year extensions, provided that we met all our targets. This will give us a five year contract to manage the Helpline and will allow us to plan for the future and enhance our service delivery.

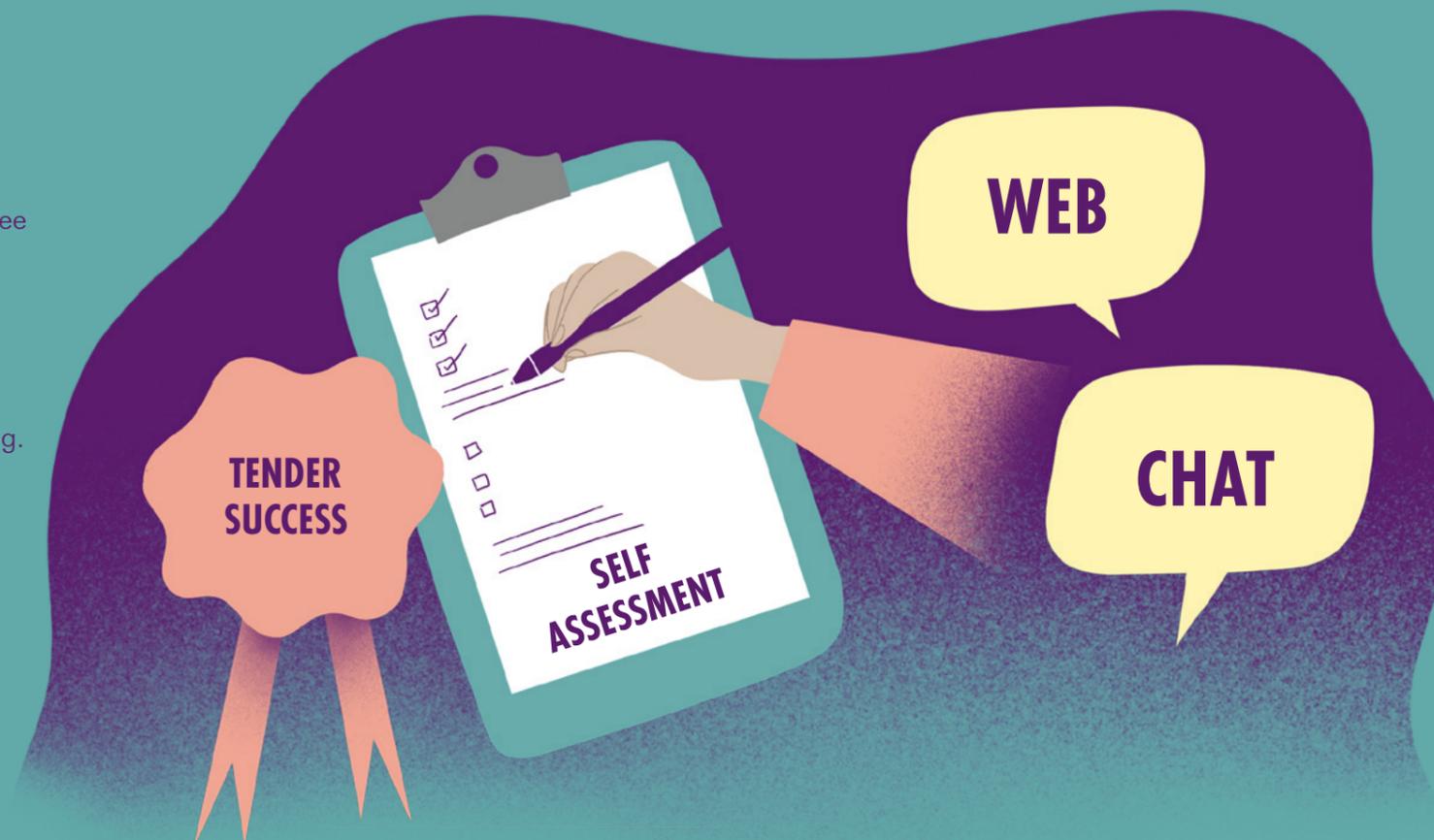
In preparation for the assessment which would make sure that we met the Helpline's Partnership Standards, we were required to complete an extensive self-assessment form. This gave us another opportunity to reflect on our service.

During the self-assessment process, we saw that we need to obtain feedback from service users. The confidential nature of our service means that we had previously been unable to identify an appropriate method of doing this. However, in January 2019, we were able to introduce a link to an anonymous survey which gave invaluable information. [See page 22]

We also had an on-site assessment in January 2019 that was extremely encouraging for our service. We received some positive feedback on the day itself, and a few weeks later we were awarded full accreditation.

When asked to sum up this year, one call handler helpfully summarised it:

"The highlights are our rising call numbers and constructive feedback being gathered from callers through the survey link. We also got accreditation from the Helpline Standards Partnership. It had been a huge task but it gave us the opportunity to evaluate procedures and practices, and prepare for the future"



HOW MANY CONTACTS DID THE HELPLINE RESPOND TO?

In total, our handlers dealt with **6440** contacts.

The majority of these were phone calls, but **432** were emails. The volume of emails has more than doubled in a year and they now make up **7%** of contacts compared to **5%** last year. For the rest of this report, we will use the terms 'call' and 'caller' to represent all contacts, whether by phone or email, for the sake of clarity.

It is difficult to determine how many of these callers are unique, since many choose to remain anonymous. On **1621** contacts, however, we were able to gather information about whether the caller had been in touch before and found that **67%** were contacting us for the first time.

For the purposes of this report, we have excluded contacts that were brief calls, outgoing calls to other agencies, administrative contacts and even misuse of the service, as we do not get the additional information that we will present in the report. Compared to last year, there was a **12%** decrease in the volume of these excluded contacts. This was due to a decrease in the number of contacts who persistently misuse the service.

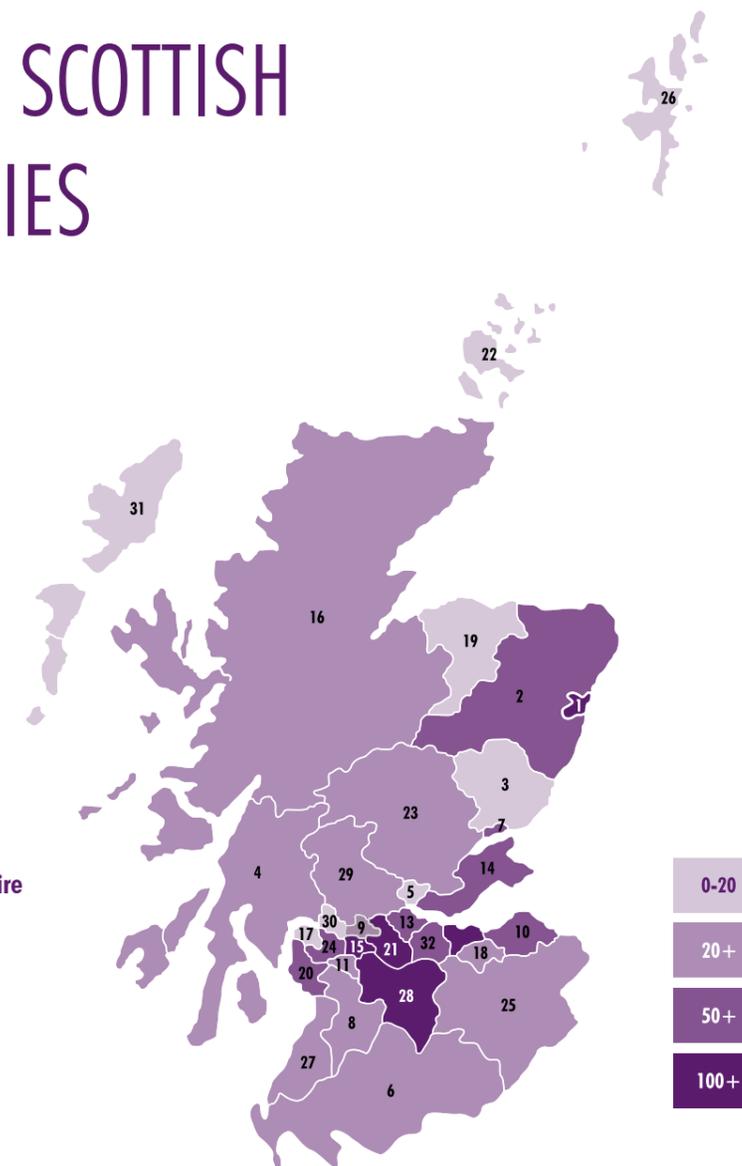
This report summarises the information we received from the remaining **3191** contacts. In **2019**, we have responded to **637** more of these contacts than in **2018**, a **25%** increase in the volume of our main helpline support calls.

Although the Helpline is based in Scotland, we also received **136** calls from England, seven from Northern Ireland, four from Wales and **34** international calls. Some of these callers were signposted to services in the country they were calling from, others were concerned about someone they know in Scotland, or individuals considering moving to Scotland to flee domestic abuse.

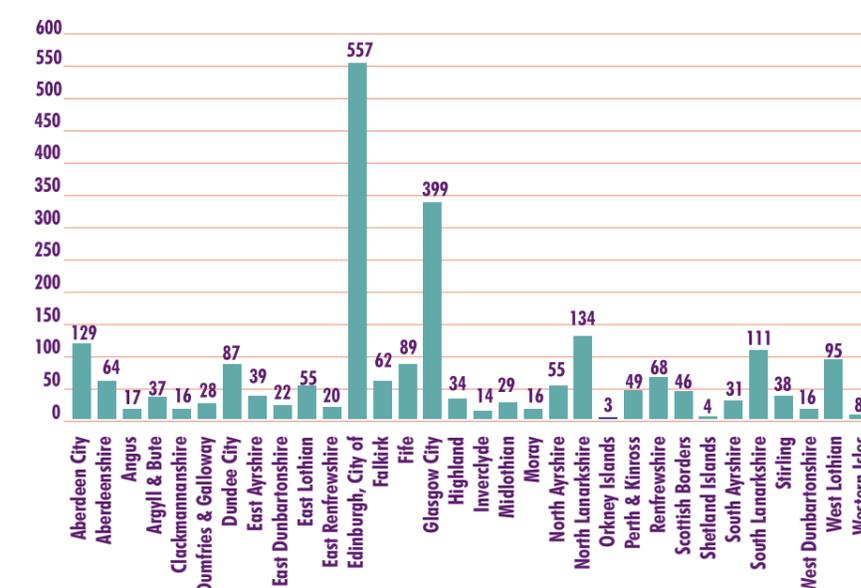


NUMBERS FROM SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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



Number of contacts from Scottish Local Authorities (N=2372)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?

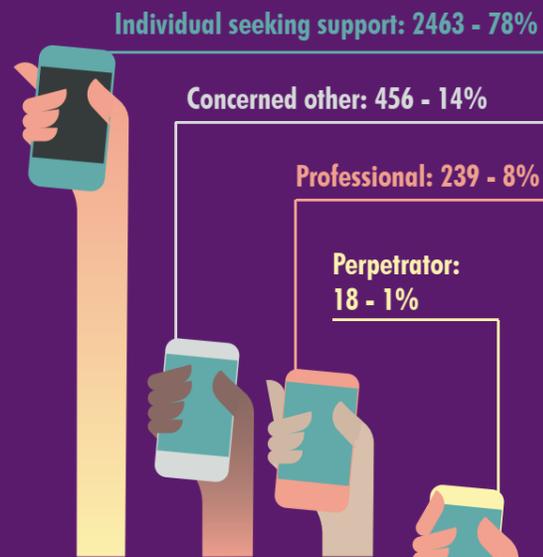
Anyone can experience domestic abuse or forced marriage. For that reason, our service is open to everyone.

Based on self-identification, **95%** of our contacts were from women seeking support, or from someone concerned about a woman. There were **5%** of calls from men seeking support or someone concerned about a man.

There were **14%** of contacts who came from 'concerned others'. This term refers to family members, friends, colleagues and neighbours who are concerned about someone else. Many of these callers are looking for information about how they can best support the person, what services are available, and who want to understand what has been happening to the person being abused.

Less than **1%** of our calls came from perpetrators. Our service cannot offer support to those who want to challenge their own abusive behaviour, but all our call handlers are trained to identify calls from perpetrators and signpost to appropriate services.

WHO CONTACT WAS WITH N = 3176



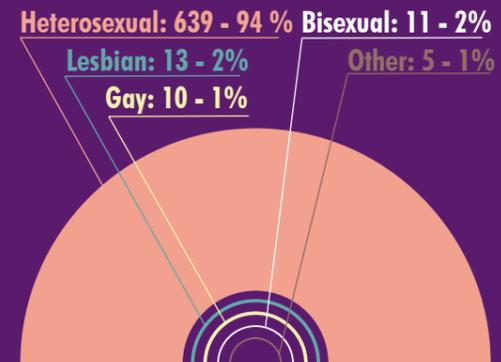
ETHNIC BACKGROUND

During the contacts, **55%** of callers described themselves as Scottish, **15%** as British, **4%** as Polish and **3%** as Pakistani. There were **22%** from other ethnic backgrounds.

DISABILITY

In **815** contacts, we were able to collect information about whether callers considered themselves to have a disability. Callers reported having a disability on **277** or **36%** of these contacts. Callers who said they had a disability often said they had more than one. The most frequently reported category was mental health, with **24%** of contacts reporting related disorders. This was followed by physical disabilities on **14%**.

SEXUALITY



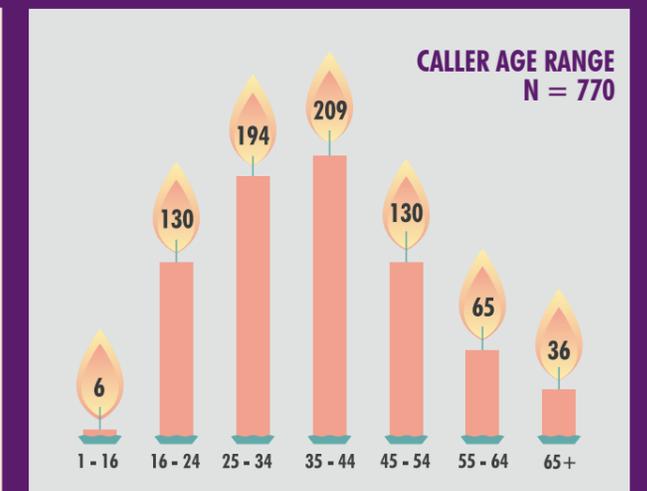
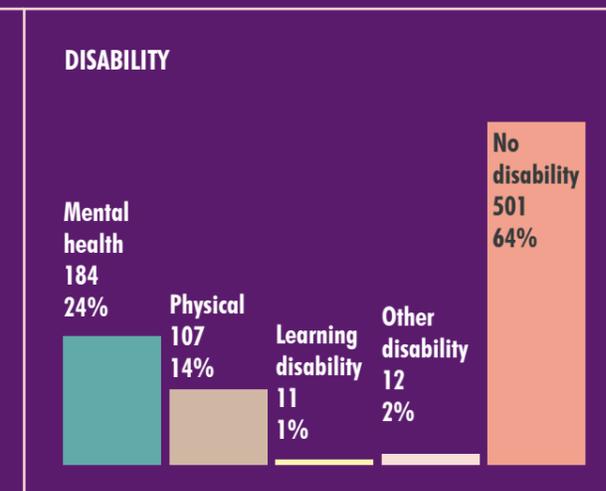
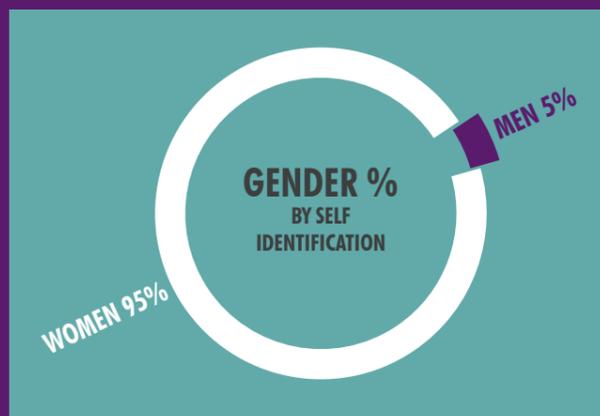
Domestic abuse can happen in any relationship and can be perpetrated by partners of any gender or sexual orientation. Sexuality can also be a risk factor for forced marriage as families may see marriage as a way to control what they perceive as unwanted sexuality. We gathered information about sexual orientation on **678** contacts. Of these, **94%** identified as heterosexual, **3%** as lesbian or gay, **2%** as bisexual and **1%** as from other orientations.

AGE

The majority of contacts related to people aged between **25** and **44**, with an average age of **38**. It is significant that we had contacts that related to individuals experiencing abuse as young as **15** and as old as **90**.

One call about a **15** year old came from a parent who was concerned that their daughter was experiencing abuse from a boyfriend of the same age. We were able to answer their questions about coercive control and signpost them to a local Women's Aid group who have specialist services for children and young people.

One of the oldest individuals was **89** years old and experiencing abuse from her new husband. Other agencies like social services and the police were already involved and one of the women's relatives called us to talk about the situation and get information about how best to support her.



CHILDREN

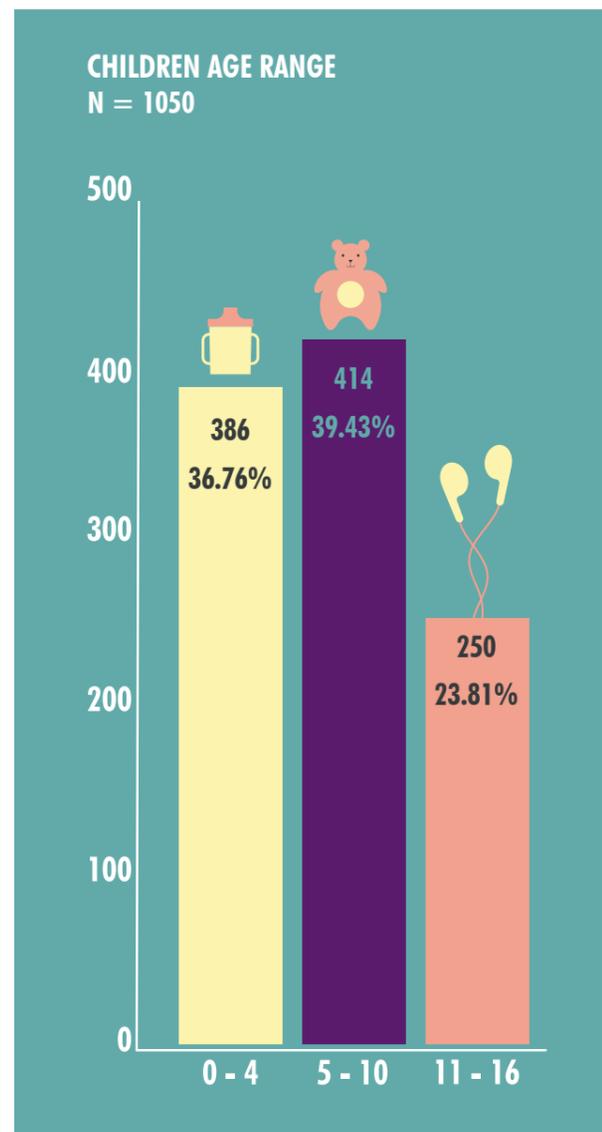
We have amassed significant information about how domestic abuse affects the children of our callers.

There were **2120** contacts and **988** people said they had at least one child under **16**. This is just over **47%**. Of those callers, **703** told us the ages of their children. They ranged from new born babies to **15** years old. Child contact was a main issue behind **390** or **12%** of these contacts.

When the people who contact us are concerned about child contact, they often feel that they have exhausted other options. Survivors of domestic abuse will often prioritise their children's safety and wellbeing over their own. They sometimes feel that a routine and structure, as well as a sense of normality, will be maintained if contact is maintained with the abuser, but often get in touch when these informal arrangements break down.

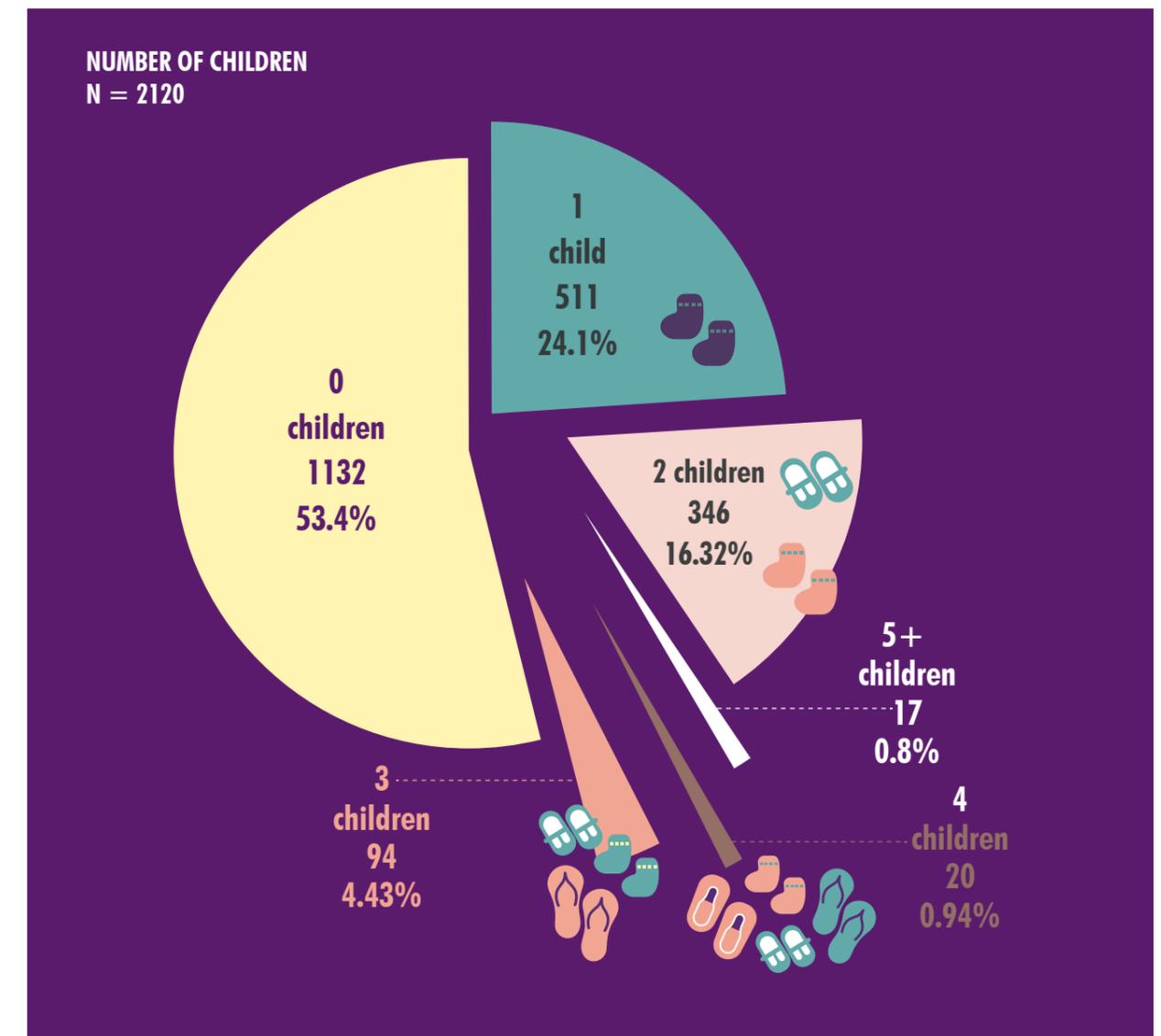
Post-separation harassment using child contact and related issues is extremely common. Many abusers use children as pawns in ongoing attempts to control their ex-partner and our callers often describe situations where the abusive parent will fight for access to their children, but fail to collect them on contact days.

Despite the abuse that they have experienced, many callers say that they do not have any desire to prevent their children from seeing the abusive parent. We regularly hear that the abuser is 'a good parent' and 'would never harm the children'. We are able to reassure survivors, however, that they don't need to be a part of child contact arrangements unless the court has ordered them to do so.



The Helpline is committed to upholding the right of children and young people to be protected from abuse and the harm that goes with it. We have robust child protection policies and procedures in place, and part of this is identifying and assessing risk and sharing appropriate information with relevant agencies.

Where possible, we will work with the non-abusing parent or carer to identify how we can support them and discuss protection measures that will help them to make informed choices that are safe for them and their child. Issues that relate to child protection came up on **52**, or **2%**, of our contacts.



WHAT DID PEOPLE CONTACT THE HELPLINE ABOUT?

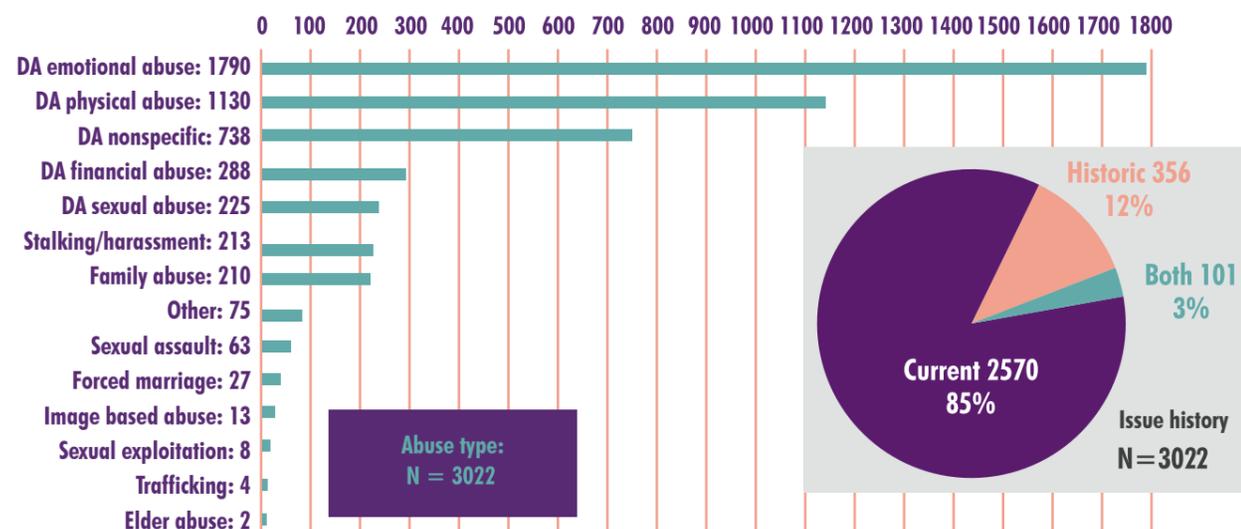
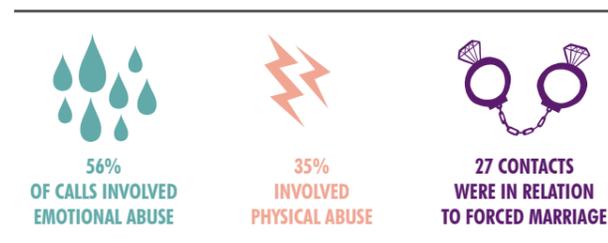
The information we collect about types of abuse reflects what callers want to talk to us about. Our call handlers only gather this information where it is relevant and appropriate to do so.

The majority of contacts we received relate to domestic abuse, including both current and historic experiences. Most callers had experienced more than one form of abuse from a partner or ex-partner. Often this involved emotional abuse coupled with another type of abuse. There were **27** contacts related to forced marriage.

Our callers are often facing complex issues and their experience of abuse can be in addition to other factors that make their situation more challenging. Callers on **136** contacts expressed suicidal feelings, **112** were having issues with alcohol or drug misuse, and **55** contacts had issues relating to immigration.

The Helpline also received contacts that related to other forms of abuse. Some were experienced in addition to domestic abuse or forced marriage and for others it was the main focus of the call. The most frequent examples were family abuse which featured in **7%** of contacts, stalking/harassment in **7%** and sexual assault in **2%**.

Other abuse types that came up included image-based abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, elder abuse, female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, online and technology abuse, pet abuse, neighbour or friend abuse, institutional abuse, as well as hate crimes.



WHAT DID CALLERS WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

People contact the helpline for many reasons. Call handlers will work in collaboration with callers to understand the issues that they are facing, their needs and resources. Sometimes callers are very clear about what they are looking for. Other times, call handlers have to draw from their specialist knowledge of what is available to identify options for support.

66% of callers were seeking emotional support. This is often in addition to other needs and concerns. Other main reasons for contacting the helpline this year were to find out information about Women's Aid services, to ask questions about domestic abuse and to talk about safety planning.

SAFETY PLANNING

Many callers are frightened about their physical safety and we explore with them how they might feel safer. This means going through what is known as safety planning.

This can include looking at escape routes in the home, keeping a spare mobile phone, or keeping a bag packed with important documents, such as birth certificates, passports or visas and money in it, among other options.

Safety planning not only aids individuals in feeling equipped with the tools to keep themselves safe in a crisis, it also helps those who feel like there is no escape to know that they have options and do not have to be trapped in their situation forever. It can additionally be useful for people who are concerned about someone experiencing domestic abuse and can be a practical way to support someone they care about.

MAIN ISSUES (N = 3148)

2092	Emotional support
1567	Info about Women's Aid services
803	Safety issues
748	Questions about domestic abuse
653	Legal issues
430	Refuge
392	Housing (Permanent or temporary)
390	Child contact issues
382	Emergency Accommodation
140	Questions about other abuse
137	Other issues
85	Info about the police
52	Child Protection
29	Crisis
21	Adult Protection
19	Info about men's services

SCOTLAND'S DOMESTIC ABUSE & FORCED MARRIAGE HELPLINE

0800 027 1234 

helpline@sdafmh.org.uk 

www.sdafmh.org.uk 



FREE
24/7

SPECIALIST
SENSITIVE
CONFIDENTIAL



HOW DID WE SUPPORT OUR CALLERS?

Contacting a helpline about domestic abuse or forced marriage can be a difficult step to take. Our Helpline is dedicated to providing a safe and confidential place for anyone who needs to talk about these sensitive issues.

Call handlers take a person-centred approach, listening to callers and believing them, seeking to understand their individual experiences and needs, as well as offering tailored information and support.

Where relevant, we also give callers information about other services, known as signposting, or we may refer them to other services directly. We may also introduce a caller to another service and transfer them, known as a 'warm referral'.

Our service is free, available 24/7, and accessible to all. To ensure we are here for everyone who needs us, we work to remove barriers. For example, where there is a language barrier, we speak to callers using a confidential interpreter service.

CALL HANDLERS' WORDS

"No two calls are the same, but many callers share similar concerns. They worry that no one will believe them, or that what has been happening isn't worth our time. They often haven't been able to talk about what's going on with anyone else. It takes a lot of courage to reach out for support."

"If there is one thing I wish callers knew before dialling our number, it's that they absolutely do deserve to be heard."



SOME OF THE SERVICES WE SIGNPOSTED TO INCLUDE:

- GP
- CAT PROTECTION
- CEDAR PROJECT
- ARMY WELFARE SERVICE
- ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
- ADVOCACY SERVICES
- ACTION ON ELDER ABUSE
- ASSIST ASYLUM HELPLINE
- BENEFITS ADVICE SERVICES
- BREATHING SPACE
- BRITISH CONSULATE
- BRITISH EMBASSY
- BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION
- COUNSELLING DIRECTORY
- CHILD MAINTENANCE OPTIONS SHELTER
- CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE SCOTLAND
- DISABILITY INFORMATION SCOTLAND CHILDLINE
- DOGS TRUST FREEDOM PROJECT DEMENTIA SCOTLAND
- DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINES CRISIS CENTRE
- DOMESTIC ABUSE DISCLOSURE SCHEME
- FAMILIES OUTSIDE DAAS DASAT
- ETHNIC MINORITIES LAW CENTRE
- EMERGENCY SERVICES EHAP CPN
- DRINKLINE FAMILY LAW ASSOCIATION
- EDDACS FAMILY LIVES FEARLESS
- FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT
- NATIONAL LGBT+ DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE (GALOP)
- CITIZEN'S ADVICE SCOTLAND HOME-START
- HEALTH SERVICES HOUSING ASSOCIATION
- HEMAT GRYFFE LANDLORD MIND
- LAW SOCIETY SCOTLAND SSPCA
- LGBT HELPLINE MEN'S ADVICE LINE
- LONE PARENT HELPLINE SOCIAL WORK
- SOLICITOR REVENGE PORN HELPLINE
- TRAUMA COUNSELLING LINE SCOTLAND
- SCOTTISH WOMEN'S RIGHTS CENTRE
- SHAKTI STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
- LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING SCOTTISH CHILD LAW CENTRE
- NATIONAL DEBTLINE MODERN SLAVERY HELPLINE
- NATIONAL STALKING HELPLINE
- SCOTTISH DRUG DIRECTORY
- SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD
- SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID
- PENUMBRA PARENTLINE
- PET FOSTERING SERVICE SCOTLAND
- PMS CLINIC POLICE
- VICTIM SUPPORT SCOTLAND
- RAPE CRISIS SCOTLAND
- WOMEN'S AID SAMARITANS
- STREET WORK RESPECT
- THE WOMEN'S PROJECT
- TARA UNION
- MP

SUPPORT WITH LEGAL ISSUES

Our call handlers record information about any contacts that involve legal issues. This may be an ongoing legal issue or a call where someone is considering their options before making a decision. By recording this information, we can ensure that we have the right training and resources in place to help us meet these needs.

The most frequent concern of callers presenting with a legal issue is child contact and custody or residence arrangements. The Helpline started gathering legal issue statistics in 2016, and this has been the primary legal concern raised each year. Overall there were **34%** of legal issue calls this year relating to child contact and custody arrangements.

The new Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 is due to come into force in April 2019 and criminalises domestic abuse as a pattern of Behaviour involving coercive control. It is notable that the experiences of many callers highlight the use of child contact as a means to abuse and control.



This is a consistent theme in a number of these calls.

- Child contact was being used as a way to further control those who have experienced domestic abuse. Many callers reported that their abuser was using family court processes as a means to continue abuse, often by attempting to exhaust the caller's financial and emotional resources
- Other callers reported that their ex-partners were making malicious allegations to try to have children removed from their care. Some callers told us that they were being abused at child contact handovers
- A number of callers had lost residence of their children as a result of abuse
- Parents were concerned for their children when child contact was taking place. This included cases where children were stating that they did not want to attend court-ordered contact
- Callers who were preparing to leave abusive partners wanted to consider what the implications would be in terms of child contact
- Some callers raised issues about child contact if they were to flee to another country, or if their ex-partner was to kidnap their children and take them abroad

The range of questions and concerns raised by callers demonstrates the need for support around child contact issues where domestic abuse is occurring. Parents are often trying to navigate complex systems whilst trying to ensure the safety of their children and themselves. The Helpline frequently signposts callers to organisations that provide specialist legal advice relating to domestic abuse and child contact.



LEGAL ISSUES

Subject of Legal Proceedings: 2%

Other 12%

Witness in a Court Case: 14%

Housing/Exclusion Orders: 18%

Interdicts/Non-Harassment Orders: 20%

Child contact/Custody: 34%

WORKING ON THE HELPLINE

CALL HANDLERS' WORDS

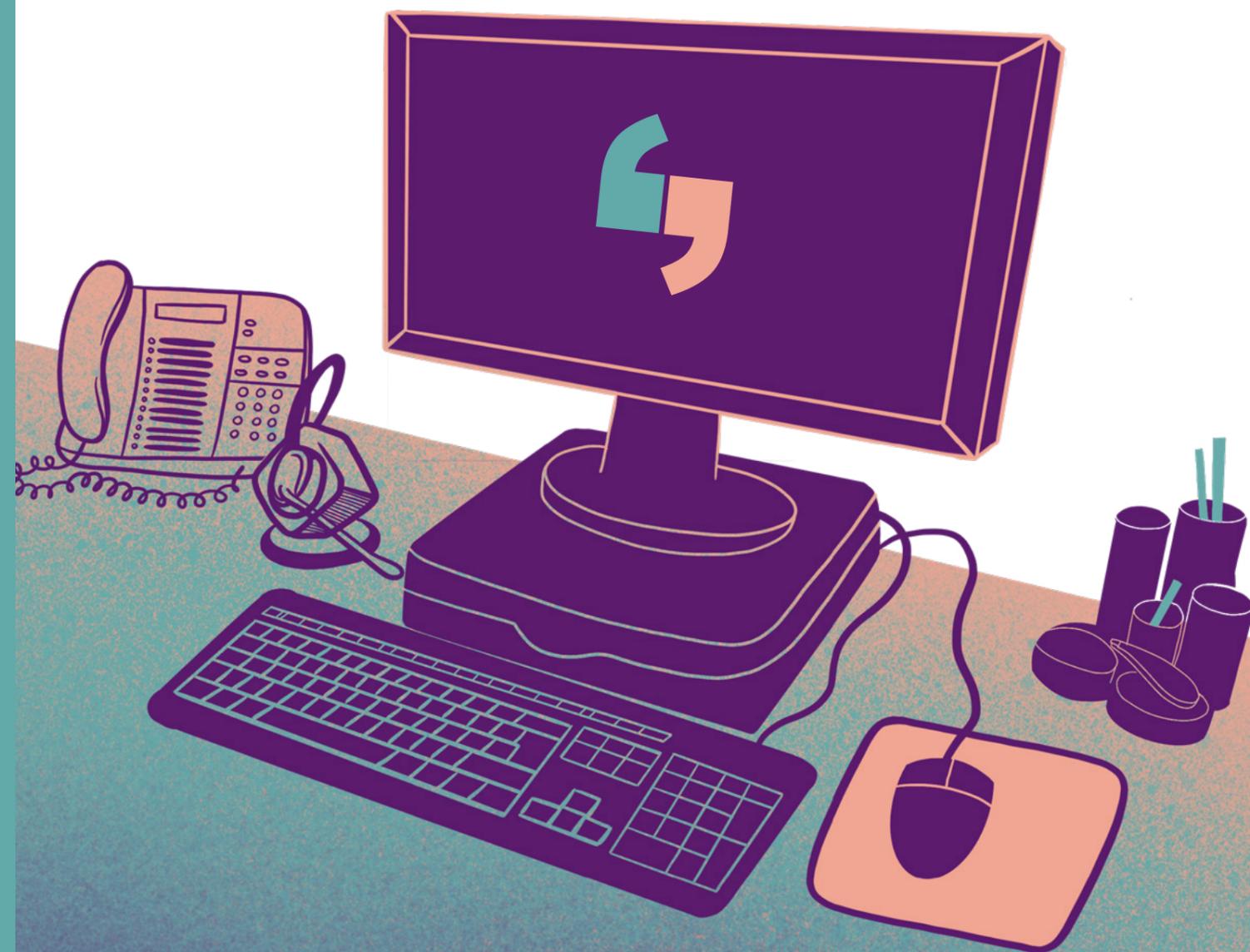
“People have assumptions that working nights must be difficult. It does have its challenges, but it’s also a privilege to be that person who is there in the middle of the night, ready to take someone’s call. You wish that no-one was in that situation. But people do need help, and it is a good feeling knowing that we’re always here for them.”

“As a non-judgemental service, it can be affecting to hear callers’ relief at not being told what to do and not being blamed for their situation. Callers experiencing domestic abuse have often encountered other agencies who they feel have blamed them for the abuse, given them ultimatums or judged them about staying with their abuser.

We understand that callers are the experts on their own lives. We recognise their strengths and their ability to determine the best approach to their own situation. Our role is making sure they have all the support they need.”

“The training that I received when I started working at the helpline went way beyond what I had expected. Before taking calls, we are trained on subjects that are likely to come up – things like the dynamics of domestic abuse, legal issues and housing, and more specialist training in areas like supporting callers from the LGBTQ+ community.

One of the most meaningful parts of the training for me was visiting a local Women’s Aid group and a court support service. Getting this insight into the kinds of services that we might suggest to a caller was invaluable.”



WHAT CALLERS SAY

Near the end of 2018/19 we introduced a new service user feedback survey. The aim was to gather feedback from our callers about the experience of using the Helpline. Between February and March 2019 we received **33** responses. We will continue gathering this service-user feedback and next year we will have a full twelve months of feedback analysis to share.

Results are presented here for the sake of interest.

- There were **100%** of callers who said that they got what they needed from the Helpline
- While **94%** of callers were connected at the first time of trying or received an email response within our two-day window, the remaining **6%** of callers got through after holding or called back later
- The Helpline service was rated **4.9** out of a possible five for overall service, with **91%** of callers rating as the maximum five out of five

So it's not my fault? That's made me feel so much better. Thank you, I needed to hear that.

Thank you for giving my abuse a name. I feel better already.

I feel more confident about my future.

You have such a calming voice and you've listened to me and understood – that alone feels like a good first step. You're doing a wonderful job.

- When asked how supportive and respectful the call handler was in their communication, **100%** of callers gave it five out of five
- When asked how knowledgeable the call handler was about the topics they wanted to discuss, the helpline was rated **4.8** out of a possible five and **91%** of callers gave it five out of five

You've given me hope at least. I certainly feel better having talked to someone who understands and going through the options.

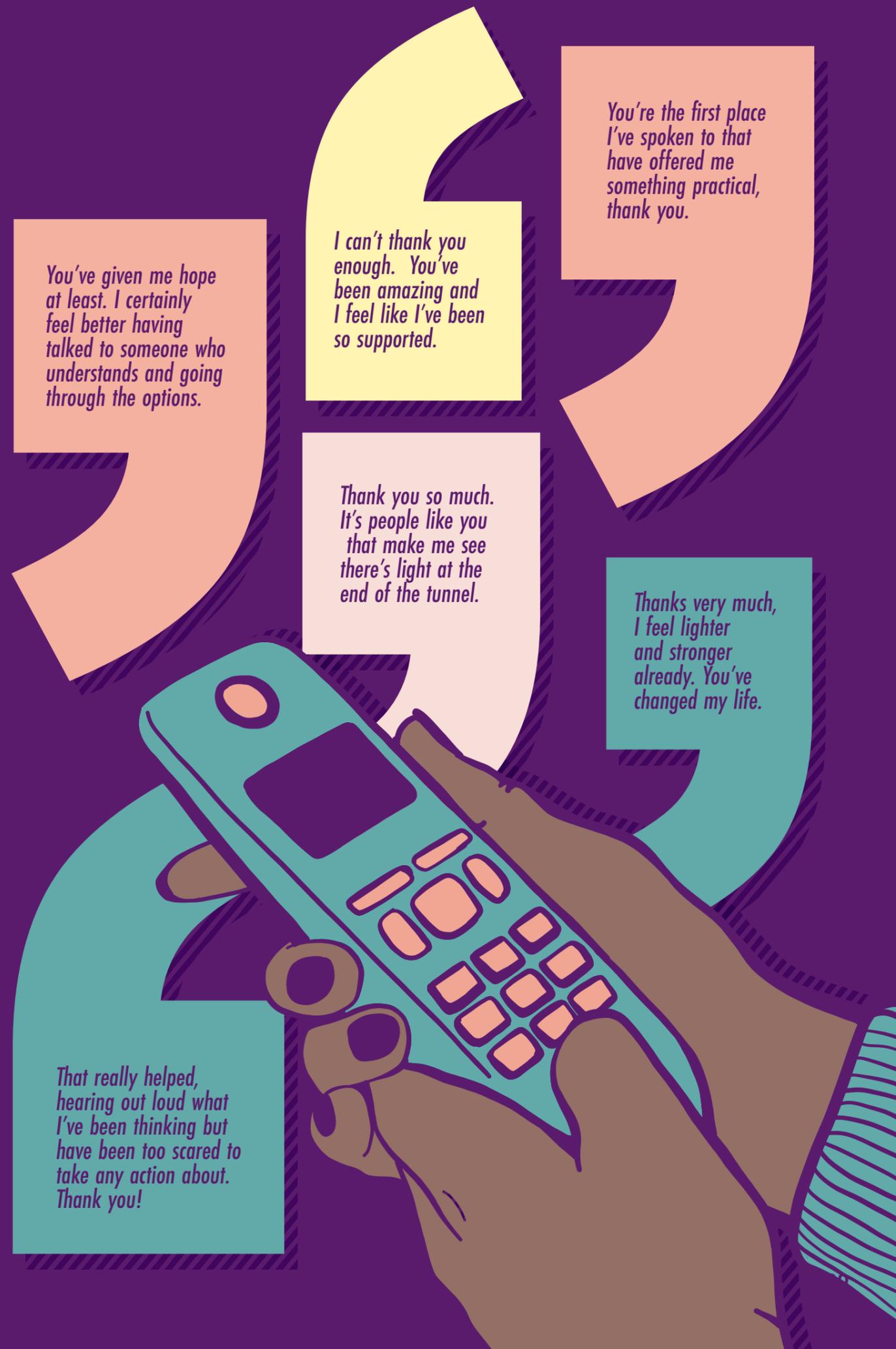
I can't thank you enough. You've been amazing and I feel like I've been so supported.

Thank you so much. It's people like you that make me see there's light at the end of the tunnel.

You're the first place I've spoken to that have offered me something practical, thank you.

Thanks very much, I feel lighter and stronger already. You've changed my life.

That really helped, hearing out loud what I've been thinking but have been too scared to take any action about. Thank you!



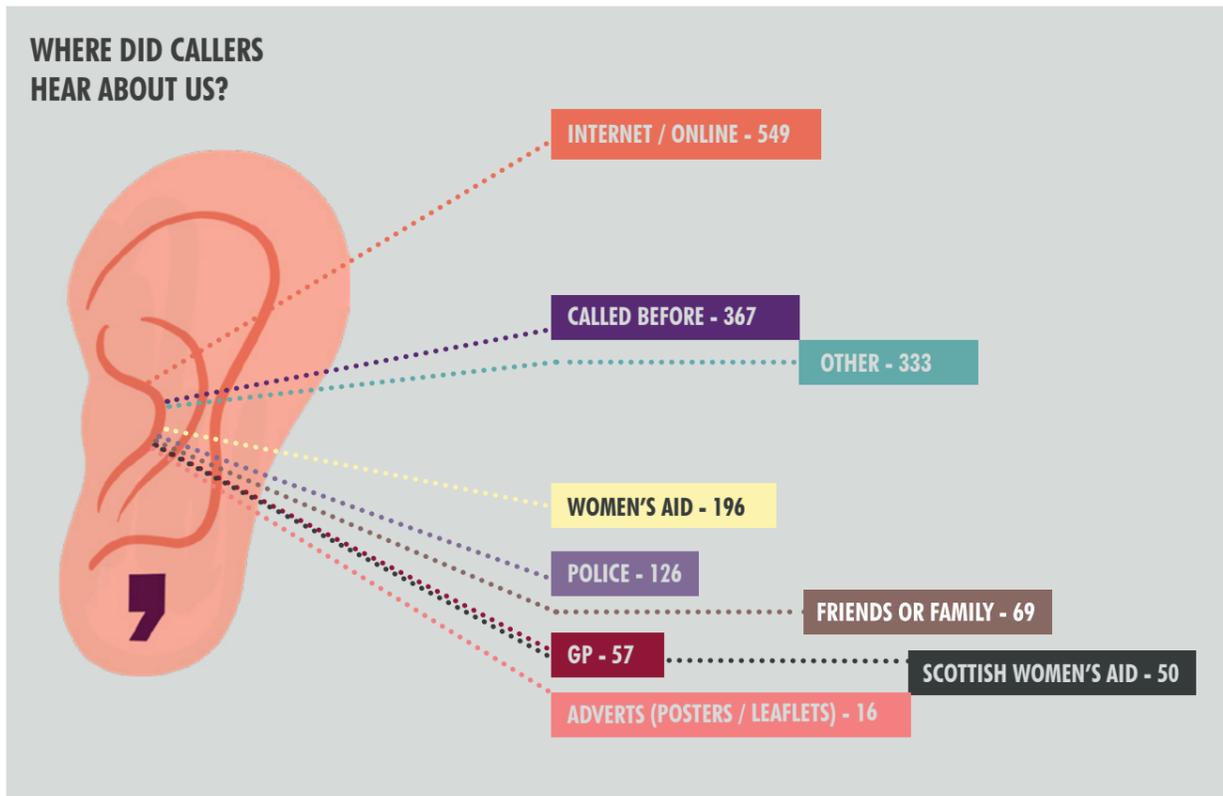
COMMUNICATIONS & PROMOTION

We continued to promote the Helpline. Our focus was particularly on social media and other online platforms. To this end, we developed a paid-for social media ad campaign designed to build awareness of the Helpline and its work among people who may not previously have known about our service.

This involved working with a designer to create a Facebook-friendly advert that would communicate key messages. By the end of the ad campaign, the resultant image had been seen by over **13,000** people who may not have been familiar with the Helpline. Reaching new and underrepresented audiences is a key communications objective for us, and we feel this campaign was effective in doing that.

Another major piece of communications work this year was working with the Scottish government on its national advertising campaign to promote a change in the law on domestic abuse. We sat on the working group for the campaign and gave input on effective and sensitive messaging on domestic abuse.

The campaign will include a TV advert, radio spots and outdoor publicity drive over 2019 and 2020, following the implementation of Scotland's new domestic abuse law.

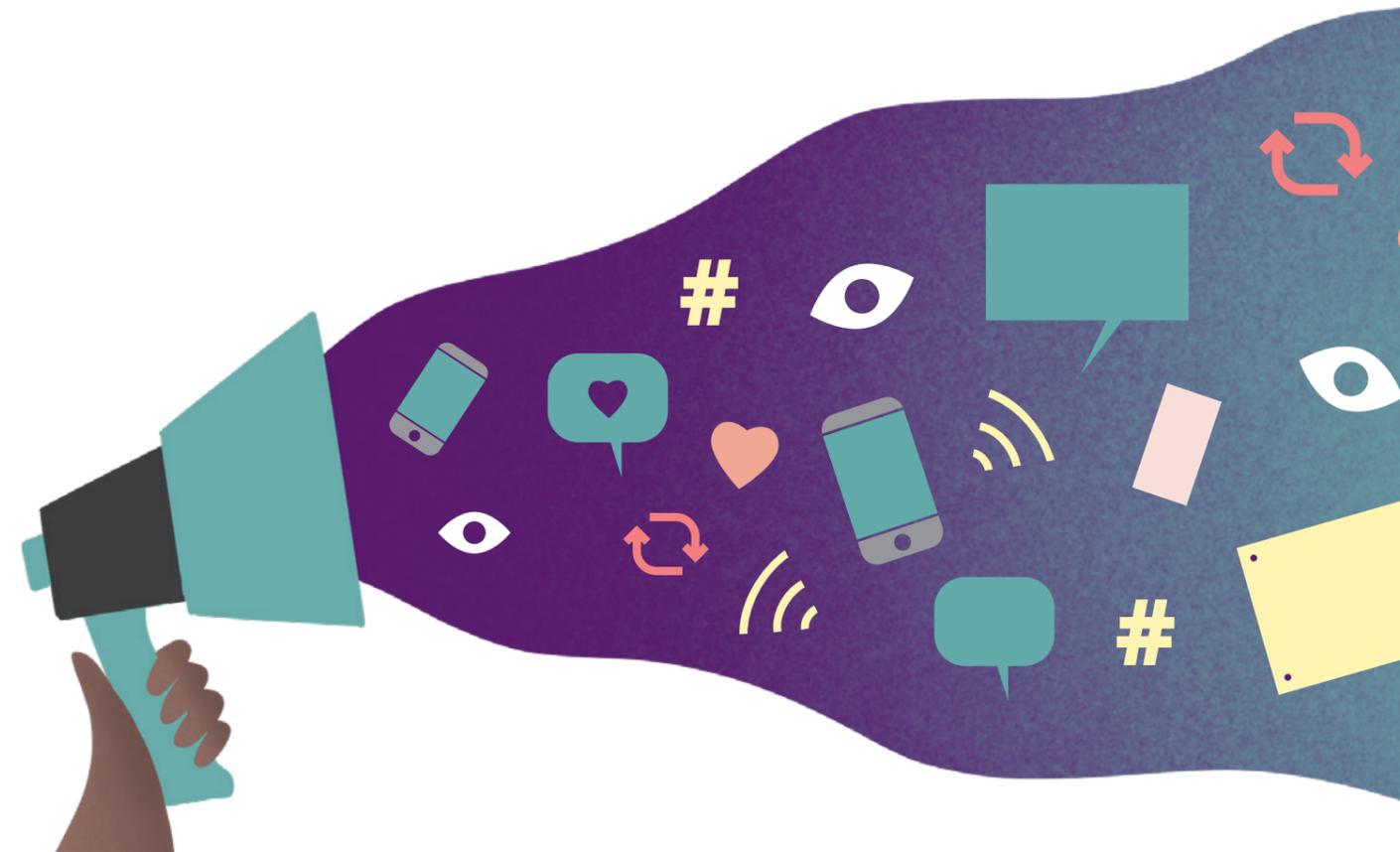


SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

A significant amount of work has taken place on our search engine optimisation. We have seen a steady increase in visitors to the Helpline website to the extent that the most common way for callers to find out about us is through the internet, with **31%** of people who contacted us using this means.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Raising awareness of the services we provide and communicating information about the Helpline is hugely important. We work with partner organisations to add the Helpline number to their promotional materials where we can and we continue to produce our own posters, leaflets and other informative resources to promote the Helpline.



One of the most helpful things you can do for those experiencing domestic abuse is make sure they are aware of sources of available help. Please contact us if you would like any posters, leaflets or promotional materials that will build this awareness.

You can also play your part by sharing social media content about the Helpline. It will go out from **@scotwomensaid** on Twitter and from Scottish Women's Aid on Facebook. With your help, we can reach more people than ever before and transform lives.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We now have three years' experience running the Helpline. This gives us a much clearer view of how we can develop the service further and enhance the operating model.

We have learned a huge amount about running a quality Helpline service and we know:

- Who our callers are
- Why they are calling the Helpline
- What they are looking for
- How to provide the service they need
- Where we can increase access to the service

In order to deliver the best service possible in the coming year, we will:

- Increase the out-of-hours call diversion service for local Women's Aid groups so that callers can get 24 hour access to services
- Monitor the implementation of the new domestic abuse legislation and the impact it will have on our callers
- Further expand our profile in the Black and Minority Ethnic community
- Build on our expertise in understanding our callers' needs
- Maintain and improve the accessibility and quality of our service

We are constantly looking for ways to improve our service and we know that when we work in partnership with likeminded organisations, our service is enhanced.

Please contact the Helpline if you would like to discuss ways in which we can support each other to deliver improved services for those experiencing domestic abuse and forced marriage, or if you would like any additional information on the work done by the Helpline.



THANK YOU

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.





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