



## Appendix E: Safe Helpline Data



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The Department of Defense (DOD) Safe Helpline (SHL) provides crisis intervention, support, information, and referrals to resources for members of the DOD community who experience sexual assault. The service is confidential, anonymous, secure, and available at all hours of the day. Its availability ensures that all victims have a place to safely disclose sexual assault allegations, express concerns, and obtain information. As such, this resource provides victims a key source of support, particularly for those who might not otherwise reach out for help through face-to-face military channels. The Department leverages SHL as an accessible point-of-entry for the military community that facilitates sexual assault reporting to Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocates (SAPR VAs). This summary provides an overview of users served and services provided by SHL in Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19).

## Usage and Outreach

SHL was utilized by a growing number of members in the DOD community in FY19 (see Figure 1). In the past year, 36,966 users (28,909 online users and 8,057 phone users) contacted SHL for services.

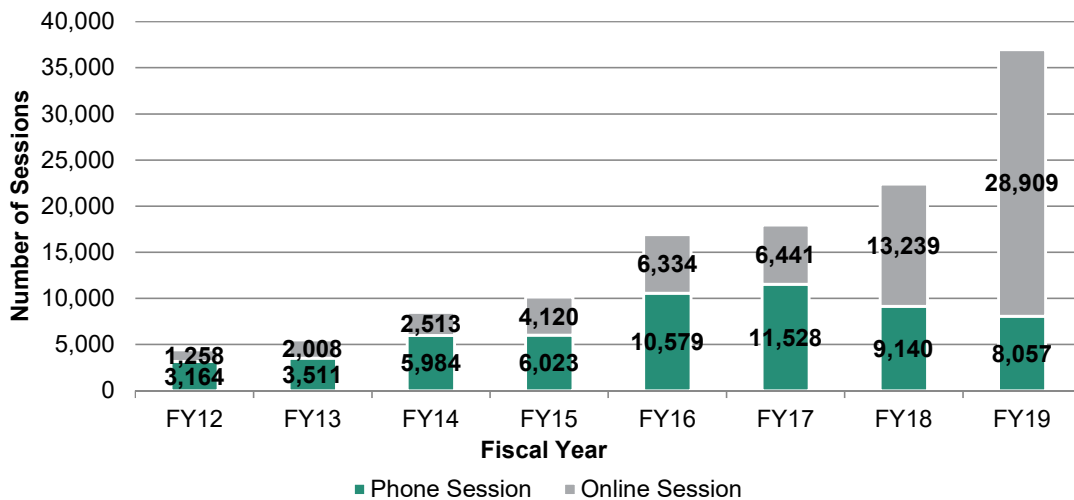


Figure 1. SHL Online and Telephone User Sessions

## Phone and Online Sessions

The analysis of users and services provided is based on anonymous data obtained through calls and online chats. Information is never solicited. As a result, SHL staff do not always know if callers are currently a Service member, a retired or separated member, or in some other status. Key FY19 findings, based on 2,972 in-depth session assessments, are outlined below.

## User Characteristics

Users primarily identified themselves as victims contacting SHL to discuss issues related to their own sexual assault. Of the 2,316 sessions in which an event was discussed and the user-victim relationship was disclosed, 87 percent of users identified themselves as victims. In addition to victims, other users identified themselves as friends, family members, and intimate partners of a

victim. Allied professionals and SARCs seeking information about services also used SHL. Some users called on behalf of a victim to learn how they could provide support and help prevent re-victimization. While women were the most frequent users of SHL, the available gender data indicated that 36 percent of the 701 phone users were men.

## Disclosure

The majority of victims (70 percent of the 2,005 users who identified as such) discussed whether or not they had previously disclosed their assault to any other party. Of those that indicated a prior disclosure, one-third disclosed an assault for the first time on SHL, while two-thirds had previously disclosed to someone else before contacting the resource. It is important to note that disclosure in this context does not necessarily mean making an official report. Online users were more likely than telephone users to disclose for the first time. Specifically, 40 percent of 917 online users (compared to 21 percent of 486 phone users) disclosed for the first time on the helpline.

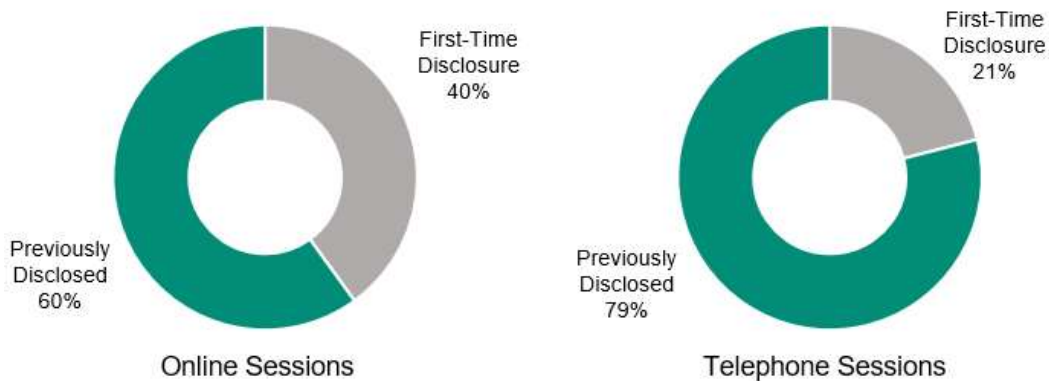


Figure 2. Disclosure by Type of Interaction

Of victims who previously disclosed (943 people), more than half (52 percent) discussed the reactions of those they disclosed to. The majority (60 percent) of these users discussed negative reactions, such as instances where they were treated differently, dismissed, blamed or where the recipient took control of the situation.

## Reporting Concerns

Users frequently contact SHL to discuss reporting-related concerns and connect to resources that might ultimately lead to an official report. To better understand these concerns, SAPRO analyzed data from a sample of 1,417 users who identified as adult victims of sexual assault in an FY19 SHL contact. Within this sample, most incidents discussed involved a military-affiliated victim or military-affiliated alleged perpetrator. Key findings pertaining to reporting concerns are as follows:

- More than half (59 percent) of the 1,417 users stated they had not yet made a sexual assault report, underscoring that SHL serves as an important first step for victim assistance, understanding reporting options, and recovery. Only 8 percent of users had previously reported their incident to a military authority, while 33 percent did not disclose whether they had reported or not.

- Of the 115 victims who discussed motivations behind their decision to report, the reasons most frequently mentioned were: to stop the alleged offender from hurting others (41 percent), to punish the alleged offender (25 percent), to stop the alleged offender from hurting the victim again (20 percent), and to seek mental health assistance (12 percent).<sup>1</sup>

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

### Concerns of Men Who Disclose Victimization

SHL plays a key role in the Department's efforts to enhance support and resources for male Service members impacted by sexual assault. SHL staff receive specialized training to address sexual assault stigma, and common physical and mental health concerns. SHL data provide insight into concerns unique to male victims, as one-third of phone users are men.

FY19 data expanded the Department's understanding of male SHL users in several areas. Men were more likely than women to disclose their assault for the first time on SHL. Specifically, 34 percent of 191 men (compared to 26 percent of 593 women) had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting SHL. Men were more likely to discuss past events, such as events that occurred one or more years ago, than women. This trend was most pronounced for victims who had not disclosed to anyone prior to contacting the helpline. These findings have important implications for both SHL as well as the *Men's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Plan*, described in the main body of this report.

### Referrals to Military Resources

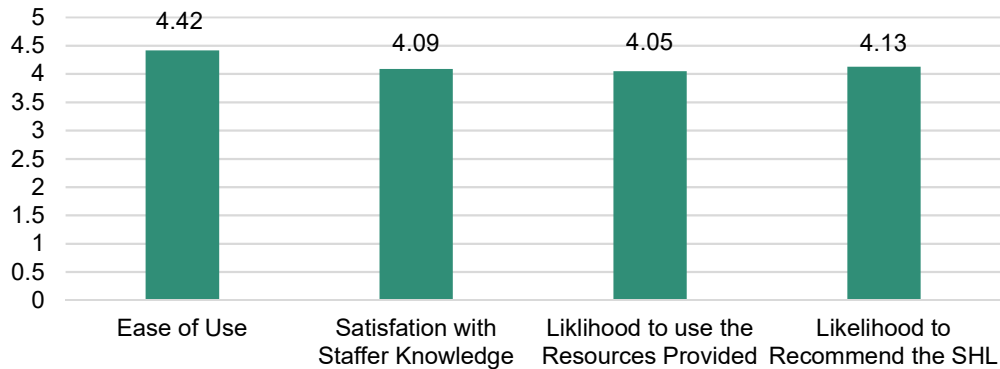
Of the 2,972 user sessions analyzed, nearly one-fifth accepted referrals to military resources. One in nine users accepted a referral to a SARC. At the user's request, SHL staff directly connected callers to on-base resources in three percent of phone sessions. Most calls were transferred to SARCs. Of the 2,005 cases analyzed in which a victim was identified, military resource referrals were accepted in 18 percent of sessions. One in ten victims stated that they had already accessed or attempted to access military services prior to contacting SHL. Civilian referrals were provided as an alternative in more than one-third of sessions analyzed (35 percent).

### User Feedback

Users provided satisfaction ratings for 160 phone and 1,153 online sessions in FY19. Ratings remained high throughout the year despite the increase in user volume. Average ratings were above a 4.0 on a scale of 1-5 on all domains, including ease of use, satisfaction with staffer knowledge and service, likelihood to recommend SHL, and intent to use resources provided.

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



**Figure 3. Average FY19 User Feedback Satisfaction Ratings (Scale of 1-5)**

## Additional Resources

### SHL Educational Tool

In FY19, SHL launched two new online self-paced educational programs for service providers and allied professionals, *Suicide 101: Responding to Suicidal Ideation among Survivors of Sexual Assault*, and *Transitioning Service Members*. SHL also continued to attract users to the previously launched self-paced courses, *Building Hope & Resiliency*, *How to Support a Survivor*, and *Safe Helpline 101*.

### Safe HelpRoom

Safe HelpRoom is an anonymous, moderated online group chat service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This resource allows individuals who have experienced sexual assault in the military to connect and support each other. Special sessions just for men are available every Sunday. In FY19, the Safe HelpRoom hosted 4,931 visitors. Nearly one-third of visitors (32 percent) joined when there was at least one other visitor present in peer chat.

Local Safe HelpRoom launched in May of 2018. This resource leverages existing Safe HelpRoom technology and puts it in the hands of local SARCs and SAPR VAs to operate their own online, moderated sessions. D-SAACP certified SARCs and SAPR VAs can be trained as moderators and are able to host their own sessions for their communities. In FY19, marketing strategies for Local Safe HelpRoom were expanded to further engage SARCs and SAPR VAs.

### Prison Rape Elimination Act Hotline

SHL serves as a hotline for individuals assaulted in military correctional facilities, playing a key role in the Department's implementation of the requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act. In FY19, SHL received six calls from users in military correctional facilities. In addition to providing crisis intervention, information, and referrals, staff assist callers with both Unrestricted and Anonymous reports. Staff facilitate anonymous reports, complete mandated reporting as required by law, and facilitate warm handoffs to SARCs for Unrestricted reports.