



Respect Phonline client satisfaction survey 2009-10 report

Thangam Debbonaire, March 2010

1. Introduction

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

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

Both helplines have been accredited by The Helplines Association (THA). As a condition of their continued accreditation status they have to carry out a customer feedback survey each year. In the first year, this consisted of a substantial piece of work including interviews of up to 45 minutes with callers to both lines, asking about their experiences of the line in detail, which led to interviewees providing more information about their own perceptions of their situations and needs. The evaluation included observation of the helpline workers taking calls, interviews with the helpline workers (then one worker per line, plus a coordinator who also took calls on both lines).

Since that first evaluation (Debonnaire, 2008) the helplines have expanded in staff numbers and opening hours. Four staff and one coordinator now take calls. The opening hours of both lines are now 10am – 5pm with the lines closed between 1 and 2. Emails are also used as a method of providing advice, information and support on both lines.

2. Aims of the survey

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

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

3. Methodology

3.1 Telephone survey

All three helpline workers (Clare, Natalie and Ali) who take calls and emails for the Respect Phoneline took part in gathering contacts for the survey during November and December 2009 and late January and early February 2010.

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

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

A total of 58 the Respect Phonenumber gave consent for the helpline worker to pass on their details to me.

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

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

The hardest group to contact successfully were professionals. Many said that they would call me back, or asked me to call back at a specific time but then did not call back or were still not available.

3.2 Email data gathering

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

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Who took part in the survey?

37 telephone callers took part in the telephone survey and 17 email clients responded to the electronic survey.

4.1.1 Category of caller

According to the information presented during the call, by the caller to the helpline worker, they were classified as one of several categories as listed below. Some callers ring with problems which are not relevant to the helpline and none of these callers were asked to take part in the survey.

Category of telephone caller to the helpline, as identified by the worker	Telephone respondents (n=37)
Perpetrator	24
Victim	5
Perpetrator presenting as victim	1
Professional	6
Friend/family	0
Missing data	1

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

The email respondents were asked how they would describe themselves their current or recent experiences of domestic violence or abuse. This does not provide comparable data to the information provided by the workers about callers who used the telephone to contact the helpline.

How would you describe your current or most recent relevant experiences of domestic violence or abuse (probably the reason why you called the helpline)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Using violence or abuse against partner or ex	17.6%	3
Experiencing violence or abuse from partner or ex	23.5%	4
Using AND experiencing violence or abuse from and to partner/ex	17.6%	3
Friend or relative of someone who is using violence/abuse	5.9%	1
Professional working with someone using violence/abuse	23.5%	4
Friend or relative of someone experiencing violence/abuse	0.0%	0
Professional working with someone experiencing violence/abuse	11.8%	2
Someone have relationship problems but not violence	0.0%	0
Not sure	0.0%	0
Something else	0.0%	0
Say more if you wish		1
answered question		17
skipped question		0

4.1.2 Gender

The respondents' gender was as follows:

Gender of respondent	Telephone survey (n=37)	Electronic survey (n=17)	Total
Male	26	5	31
Female	11	12	23

The gender of professional callers was not recorded as Helpline Workers systematically record the gender of callers experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence and abuse.

4.1.3 Age

The ages of the email clients were as follows:

What is your age?	Telephone survey (n=37)	Electronic survey (n=17)	Total (n=54)
Under 18	0	0	0
18 – 21	0	0	0
21 – 30	3	3	6
31 – 40	12	6	18
41 – 50	8	7	15
51 – 60	1	0	1
Over 60	2	1	3
Missing data	11	0	11

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

4.1.4 Ethnicity

	Telephone survey (n=37)	Email survey (n=17)	Total
White/British	27	16	42
Black/Afro-Caribbean	0	0	0
Indian/Pakistani/Asian	0	0	0
African	0	0	0
Other	2	1	3
Missing	8	0	9

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

Ethnicity was provided to me by the helpline worker passing the details of the caller on for me to call. This information was not always complete and so the data is not included for 8 of the callers to the Respect Phonenumber.

4.1.5 Geography

The telephone respondents were from around England (25) and Wales (2). This included callers from areas where there is no community based perpetrator programme, which is a particular challenge for the helpline workers as it severely limits where they can refer a caller on to.

Data was missing in 10 cases, which means that for 10 of the callers referred to me by the helpline workers, either they had refused to provide that information or the helpline worker did not record it when they passed it on to me. Unfortunately this means that no callers from Northern Ireland can be identified. This may mean that none volunteered to take part but it is also possible that some of the 10 callers whose geographical location was missing were from Northern Ireland.

4.1.6 Sexuality

	Telephone survey	Email survey
Heterosexual	30	15
Lesbian/gay/bisexual	1	2
Missing	6	0

For phone clients, the data recorded was provided by the worker passing the caller details across to the researcher. I did not ask any supplementary questions about sexuality in the telephone survey. Helpline workers don't record sexuality for professionals, only for clients experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence and abuse. However, the email survey allowed all clients to identify their sexuality and some professionals chose to answer the question. The lesbian caller to the Respect Phonenumber was open with

me about her sexuality but did not raise this as an additional challenge for her in receiving help for her behaviour. She did however raise her gender as an additional challenge.

4.1.7 Numbers per worker

There was a reasonable spread of telephone respondents across the three helpline workers who collected permission and contact information to pass to me for interviews.

4.2 Choice of using email rather than phone

The 17 survey respondents who completed the electronic survey because they had approached the Phoneline by email were asked why they had used email rather than the phone to contact the helpline. Their answers were as follows:

Why did you decide to use the email method of contact, rather than telephoning the helpline?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Email feels more anonymous than phone	14.3%	2
Emailing is more convenient for me	78.6%	11
I prefer to express myself in writing	7.1%	1
Phone line not open at hours I wanted	7.1%	1
Didn't know I could telephone	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		5
	answered question	14
	skipped question	3

The comments to this question provided further information about the reasons behind using email:

'In general I felt as though I could be more open via email, and I could look back at the sent and replied [sic] emails at a later date'. [electronic survey respondent]

'I was browsing the website and followed the link' [electronic survey respondent]

This suggests that the email service provides a route for some people to receive help and information which they may not otherwise receive or not to the same degree.

4.3 What did the respondents say about the service?

4.3.1 Speed of getting a response

Telephone respondents were asked if they got through to speak to someone straight away. If the answer to this question was that they did not get through straight away, they were asked if they had left a message and if so, how long it took for them to be called back. This was to measure if the helpline service is responding to messages within the target of 2 working days set in the model of work.

Get through to speak straight away?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	28	75.7
	No	6	16.2
	not sure	1	2.7
	Not relevant	1	2.7
	Total	36	97.3
Missing	System	1	2.7
Total		37	100.0

Of the 6 callers who said they did not get through to someone straight away, 4 had left a message. All four of these callers said that they had been rung back by the helpline on the same day.

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

Email survey respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the length of time it took for them to receive a response. They responded as follows:

How satisfied were you with the length of time it took for you to receive a reply to your email?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Extremely satisfied	82.4%	14
Quite satisfied	11.8%	2
Satisfied	0.0%	0
Not very satisfied	0.0%	0
Completely unsatisfied	5.9%	1
answered question		17
skipped question		0

The one person who said they were completely unsatisfied with the length of time it took for them to receive a reply did not provide any further information. It was also not possible to find out how long it had actually taken, nor whether or not their comment was reasonable, for example if they had emailed during a weekend.

FINDING: almost all of the clients who contacted the service by email were satisfied with the length of time it took for them to receive a response.

4.3.2 Satisfaction with the call

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

How well did the worker listen to you?	Telephone survey (n=37)	Email respondents – not applicable so not asked	Total – Not applicable
5 – extremely well	32		
4 – very well	3		
3 - pretty well	2		
2 – not that well	0		
1 – not well at all	0		
Missing data	0		

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

How well did the worker understand your situation?	Telephone survey (n=37)	Email respondents (n=17)	Total
5 – extremely well	28	13	41
4 – very well	6	3	9
3 - pretty well	3	1	4
2 – not that well	0	0	0
1 – not well at all	0	0	0
Missing data	0	0	0

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

How helpful was the worker/response?	Telephone survey (n=37)	Email respondents (n=17)	Total
5 – extremely helpful	26	10	36
4 – very helpful	9	6	15
3 - pretty helpful	2	1	3
2 – not that helpful	0	0	0
1 – not helpful at all	0	0	0
Can't say	0	0	0
Missing data	0	0	0

There were no significant differences in client satisfaction between the workers who take calls on the helpline.

FINDING: the callers to the Respect Phonenumber were satisfied with the responses they received from the worker. Most were extremely satisfied with the worker’s listening, understanding and helpfulness.

FINDING: in particular, 34 out of the 37 (91.9%) of telephone respondents answered “extremely” or “very” well or helpful to all three satisfaction questions.

FINDING: the clients who contacted the service by email were also mostly very satisfied with the understanding and helpfulness of the response they received.

FINDING: in particular, 17 out of 17 (100%) of email respondents answered “extremely” or “very” well or helpful to both satisfaction questions.

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

4.3.3 Outcomes of the response

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

Were you given information you needed?	Telephone survey (n=37)	% of telephone clients	Email clients (n=17)	% of email clients	Totals (n=54)	Percentage of total
Yes or mostly yes	30	81%	15	88.2%	45	83.3%
No or mostly no	3	8.1%	2	11.8%	5	9.2%
Not sure	4	10.8%	0	0	4	7.4%
Not relevant	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0

Of the 3 telephone interviewees who said that the helpline worker was not able to give them information they needed and the 4 who said they weren’t sure if they had been given information they needed, the numbers who said that they had been given an explanation for this were as follows:

	If not, did they explain why not?		Total
	Yes	not sure	Yes
Was HL worker able to give you info you needed?			
No	1	2	3
not sure	4	0	4
Total	5	2	7

FINDING: most telephone clients (81% of telephone respondents) and email clients (88.2% of respondents) were given information they needed.

FINDING: of the few telephone clients who said the helpline worker had not given them information they needed, most were given an explanation for why not.

Both email and telephone respondents were then asked if they had taken any action as a result of the call or email information. The respondents responded as follows:

Have you taken any action as a result of the call?	Telephone interview respondents (n=37)	Electronic survey respondents (n=17)	Totals (n=54)	Percentage of total sample
Yes	33	8	41	75.9%
Not yet but I intend to	0	3	3	5.5%
No	3	5	8	14.8%
n/s	1	1	2	5.5%
Missing	0	0	0	0

FINDING: 4 out of 5 callers and email clients taking part in this survey had already taken action as a result of the call or email by the time of the survey (75.9%) or intended to (5.5%).

The comments provided by respondents to the electronic survey provide some information about what they felt the benefits of or limitations to taking action were for them. These included lack of local specialist provision:

'Email said that there are no men's behaviour change groups/workshops available in Scotland other than for residents of Edinburgh' [electronic survey respondent]

'You do not currently have workshops / courses in Essex' [electronic survey respondent]

One respondent, who had said they used email to contact the helpline because of the cost of making calls from a mobile phone, repeated this as a problem in following up the email suggestion:

'Again, the cost of calling them from my mobile' [electronic survey respondent]

For others there was immediate usefulness in the response they received:

'Personal reflection around trigger points and ownership of the situation'. [electronic survey respondent]

'My partner attended a DV course which was similarly structured to the one recommended by Respect. The advice I received from you was very helpful because he had been having anger management and counselling and you confirmed my suspicion that these were not sufficient to deal with the problems' [electronic survey respondent]

FINDING: most of the email clients had taken action as a result of the information they had received in the email response from the helpline. The limitations were lack of specialist local provision and in one case the cost of making contact with the local service.

4.3.4 Overall satisfaction with the service

Callers and email clients were asked if they would recommend the helpline to someone else in a similar situation. The telephone interview respondents responded as follows:

Would you recommend the helpline to someone else in a similar situation?	Telephone interview respondents (n=37)	Electronic survey respondents (n=17)
Yes	36	15
No	0	1
n/s	0	1
Missing	1	0
Total	37	17

Comments in the telephone interviews and to the electronic survey request for more information about this question provided illustrations of why they would or would not recommend the helpline to others.

'Can't think of any improvements. She was certainly right for me. Read me and the situation very well and worked out how the other side feels. She saw right through me and it was really helpful.' [telephone respondent]

This comment was offered voluntarily by a man who had called the Respect Phonenumber and reflects other similar comments made by similar callers. This strongly suggests that callers to this line, despite the fact that they are calling about something that they are doing which causes harm to others and are clearly told that this is the case, receive this information in ways which allow them to hear it and often then do something about it.

The one email respondent who said they weren't sure if they would recommend the helpline to someone else was the same respondent who said he struggled with the cost of calling the helpline and other services and this was the explanation for why he wasn't sure if he would recommend the helpline:

'I really wanted their address or email address so I can contact them [for] free' [electronic survey respondent]

The one respondent who said that he probably wouldn't recommend the helpline gave as his reason that there weren't any services in his area (he was the respondent who said that the helpline worker hadn't been able to give him the information he needed because there weren't any programmes in Essex).

FINDING: All the telephone callers to the Respect Phonenumber would recommend the helpline to someone else.

FINDING: Almost all the email clients to the Respect Phonenumber would recommend the helpline to someone else. The reasons for not recommending the helpline were because of lack of local services or difficulties in getting in touch with those services.

4.4 Any further comments or suggestions

Several callers mentioned that finding out about the line had been an accident or not easy and suggested that more publicity was needed.

'Only thing is I struggled to find service in the first place. A month ago I started looking and I found it quite difficult. When I typed this into Google it never found you. It was only when I spoke to someone I found you. Maybe I wasn't typing the right things' [telephone interview]

'I typed "looking for advice on domestic violence", nothing came up about the Respect Phonenumber.' [telephone interview]

Some others talked about opening hours:

'She was very helpful, I left the call feeling a lot more supported than when I started. Opening hours: these things don't happen 9-5. It seems a bit odd to have to make that sort of call during morning hours.' [telephone interview]

Others felt that the help was limited because of a lack of services locally:

'She was helpful as she could be but unfortunately there weren't any available places in my area.' [telephone interview]

Some callers still didn't recognise the need for them to attend a specialist perpetrator programme by the end of the call but it is possible that this is sometimes affected by the lack of such services anyway, as this caller suggests:

'Wasn't what I wanted, too far away and I think I might not need it. I am in two minds. I think I need Anger Management instead.' [telephone interview]

One professional made a suggestion for the Respect Phonenumber website to have more information about specialist programmes:

'You can improve it by having a link for Relate counsellors to find out more re programmes.' [telephone interview]

It is likely that other professionals would also benefit from this and that it may mean some professionals get the information they need without having to call.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the unmet need for programmes in specific areas and for specific clients should be carefully monitored by the Respect Phonenumber and the findings from this monitoring should be made available to other Respect staff or local services in these areas in order to support fundraising and development.

That the Respect Phonenumber website has some clear, specific and succinct information about what is and is not a perpetrator programme and what clients can expect from one.

5. Analysis

Callers and email clients agreeing to take part in the survey were mostly very satisfied with the service they had received. This applied even when they had been challenged and asked to consider the effects of their own behaviour.

There were no significant differences by ethnicity in levels of satisfaction. However, the numbers of respondents from non-white sections of the population were low and more in depth study of these specific client groups may benefit the development of the helpline.

There were no significant differences between levels of satisfaction of callers who had spoken to specific workers. This suggests that the helpline is recruiting and maintaining skilled specialist staff.

The women who had used violence provided interesting insights about their needs, suggesting a value in carrying out further research into the use of violence by women.

Following up calls and emails by contacting local specialist services can present new obstacles to perpetrators getting in touch with relevant programmes. Whilst this is clearly the responsibility of the person making the call, it is worth considering how the helpline could work more closely with local specialist services to make direct referrals.

The lack of available specialist services in large parts of the country is clearly a challenge for the helpline staff. Having engaged callers, particularly when this means engaging a perpetrator who may be resistant to doing this, it is frustrating for workers and callers alike that there are no specialist services to refer them to if they call from, say, Norfolk, or most of Scotland. In times of impending public spending cuts this is a concern for a helpline. There is a danger that funders will see funding a helpline as a sufficient minimum level of provision. Respect Phonenumber staff are now monitoring the calls and the needs in detail and will be able to provide information for other Respect staff and for funders and commissioners of services about unmet needs. It is important that this information is made available and actively used to press for necessary services to stop violence and protect victims and children.

Publicity about the service has increased considerably over the last few years and as the service develops could increase. At the moment, given the volume of calls and the needs of the callers and email clients, it may be difficult to meet increased demand for the service brought about by large volumes of publicity if the resources for staffing are not also increased, but there may be scope for managing that, for example, by providing more information on the website for professionals and other callers about the range of programmes and other interventions.

Developing a direct referral system between the helpline and local Respect accredited programmes may increase the time needed for calls so this should be considered carefully in the long term development of the service when resources allow. A pilot of this process could be considered with one of the accredited programmes using a compatible database in order to explore how this would affect workload. In the mean time, it may be helpful to carry out a monitoring exercise with some Respect members about how many referrals they believe they are receiving as a result of the Respect Phonenumber providing information about them to potential clients, their friends, relatives and professionals working with them in order to deepen understanding about the impact in the long term of calling the helpline.

6. Conclusions

The Respect Phonenumber continues to offer a high quality, reliable service, according to the people using that service and often in spite of the fact that the callers are asking for help on a difficult topic and one in which they will have a range of feelings and motivations for calling or emailing.

The email service appears to be meeting a need for clients who cannot call during the phone service opening hours or do not feel able to discuss their situation directly.

Clients are very satisfied with the quality and nature of the information the helpline provides them with. Most take action as a result of the call or email which means that staff are providing clear information for callers about what they can do next. The staff are sometimes hampered by a lack of local specialist services of an adequate quality to be able to refer callers/email clients on to but nevertheless most clients are satisfied with most aspects of the service even when they can't be given local contact details.

The data collected by the helpline can help to provide support for the development of services needed by callers and identified by some respondents to this survey as lacking. It could also help provide more information about the varying experiences of different categories of callers as well as a source of information for professionals about how to respond to these different needs.

The staff and co-ordinator of the Respect Phonenumber should be commended for providing a skilled, informative and unique service to a client group which can often be challenging to work with and in circumstances which can often compound these challenges. The people using the service are appreciative of what they receive and it seems highly likely that this will help to support reductions in domestic violence and increase the protection of victims in many cases.

Thangam Debonnaire, March 2010