

****EMBARGOED, THURSDAY MAY 15th, 2014****



Child sexual abuse Helpline missing four times the number of calls it is taking

A child sexual abuse prevention Helpline which offers confidential advice, information and support to UK adults concerned about sexual abuse is ‘missing’ an average of 2200 calls a month, over and above the 500 a month currently answered (1).

The figures are revealed as initial findings from an independent evaluation of the Stop it Now! Helpline are published (Thursday, May 15). The research, which also looks at Stop it Now! UK and Ireland’s sister Helpline in Holland, has been led by NatCen Social Research and aimed to assess the contribution such sexual abuse prevention Heliplines make to keeping children safe. Its findings reveal the importance of providing anonymous support and advice to help prevent child sexual abuse, including online harm such as sexual grooming and accessing indecent images of children.

Callers who cannot get through to the Stop it Now! UK and Ireland Helpline receive an answerphone message informing them that the line is busy and that they should call back. The missed call data covers the twelve months to March 2014. In April 2014 the Helpline missed a record number of 3,676 calls.

Key points drawn from the research include:

- A confidential helpline can provide cost effective, quality information that prompts behaviour change in adults and helps to protect children
- The Stop it Now! Helpline helps protect children from sexual abuse by helping adults with sexual thoughts, feelings or behaviour towards children to understand and manage their behaviour, and by assisting all callers to take action that protects children and young people from harm
- Two thirds of potential offenders who completed the online questionnaire had changed their behaviour to reduce the risk of committing an offence following their contact with the helpline
- Further investment in capacity on the helpline is required as demand currently exceeds capacity to take calls and prospective users may be dissuaded from calling again. An average of 450-520 calls are taken a month with 2,199 being ‘missed’ as the line is busy
- ‘Lack of awareness’ was identified as a key barrier to people accessing the Helpline at the earliest opportunity and additional resources are required to raise awareness of the Helpline
- The Helpline service should be combined with prevention education programmes for children and young people; awareness raising for parents/carers and other adults on how to protect children and recognise the signs of abuse; and efforts to promote the safe use of the internet
- The Helpline has received 31,314 contacts from 14,524 people in ten years

Director of Stop it Now!, Donald Findlater, said:

“We welcome the findings of this independent evaluation. It demonstrates the value of the Stop it Now! Helpline in protecting children from sexual abuse through our support of

people who have concerns about either the safety of a child or the behaviour of another person who may present a risk. This includes providing advice and information to those adults who may themselves represent a risk, in order that they do no harm.

“The challenge for us now is in attempting to meet demand. Since the Saville scandal, call numbers have seen a steady and sustained increase. The evaluation shows that many people had to call multiple times before they reached an operator. This is a real concern for us.

“It’s clear from this research that we have great potential to influence behaviour and protect children from harm – and we are experiencing some success. However, our ability to respond to current demand is hampered by our capacity. The research also recommends additional advertising of the Helpline, on the understanding that many who need access to our support are ignorant of the service. I have no doubt that with such improved visibility we could achieve a great deal more – but only if we have the capacity to answer the phone.”

The Stop it Now! Helpline has been operating in the UK since 2002 and takes a public health approach to tackling child sexual abuse. This approach sees all adults as responsible for preventing child sexual abuse. The Helpline looks to support them through the provision of information, advice, support and guidance. Callers may be parents or carers; people who pose a risk to children;, survivors of abuse or professionals.

In July 2013, as part of a range of measures to tackle the growing problem of viewing and downloading of indecent images of children on the Internet, Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that ‘Splash Pages’ should be implemented to warn people about the potential consequences of their illegal online behaviour. He said:

“These warning pages should also tell those who’ve landed on it that they face consequences, such as losing their job, their family, even access to their children if they continue.

“And vitally, they should direct them to the charity campaign ‘Stop it Now!’, which can help them change their behaviour anonymously and in complete confidence.”

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

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1. Missed call data financial year 2013-2014

	Month	Missed calls	Answered calls
2013	April	810	490
	May	1,613	516
	June	1,983	465
	July	2,136	538

	August	2,576	515
	September	2,588	551
	October	2,811	564
	November	2,790	574
	December	2,476	456
2014	January	2,102	545
	February	1,544	520
	March	2,963	488

2. About Stop it Now!

Stop it Now! UK and Ireland is a national campaign and Freephone confidential Helpline run by child protection charity, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation. It aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is an alliance of leading children's charities including the NSPCC, Action for Children, Barnardo's, The National Association of People Abused in Childhood and Children England working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice and The Lucy Faithfull Foundation. www.stopitnow.org.uk

3. About The Lucy Faithfull Foundation

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation celebrated 20 years of protecting children from sexual harm in 2012. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. It works with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members. Drawing on expert knowledge about child sexual abuse the charity offers a broad range of services for professionals and members of the public. These include: assessments, intervention and treatment of known offenders, case specific advice and support, training and development courses and workshops, educational programmes for internet offenders and their families, circles of support and accountability, internet safety seminars for schools (teachers, parents and children) and Parents Protect! training for professionals, parents, carers and other adults. www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk. It also runs the Stop it Now! Campaign and Helpline (0808 1000 900) www.stopitnow.org.uk and www.parentsprotect.co.uk

4. About NatCen

NatCen Social Research is an independent, not for profit organisation. We believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. The Crime and Justice Team at NatCen specialises in research on interpersonal abuse and violence.