



Thematic Briefing COVID 19

July 2021

The 1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain (Helpline) (715-08000) is a free, confidential phone counselling service providing information and support for anyone in Papua New Guinea (PNG) experiencing family violence or sexual violence issues. Since 2017, we have received over 50,000 calls from all 22 Provinces in Papua New Guinea.

This brief examines calls before COVID (2019 to March 2020) compared to during COVID (April 2020 to March 2021) by looking at the quarterly average before and during COVID for different data.

Who is calling 1-TOK?

75% increase in all calls

The status quo pre-COVID was that 2,089 calls were received per quarter on average. This increased 75% to 3,659 calls per quarter. This is in part due to an increase in callers wanting information about COVID 19, as well as increase in callers seeking information about the helpline services. This has in turn increased return callers, as callers who received information in the first instance then contact the helpline for further support.



98% increase in calls from men (vs. 50% increase from women)

This is due to an increase in men seeking information or as a witness to violence. Most survivors of violence are female. Pre-COVID, there were 1,089 calls per quarter from men, compared to 2,151 during the COVID period. This compares to only a 50% increase in women (975 per quarter vs. 1459 per quarter).

During the COVID period, the gender split between men and women callers was 70-30. 1-TOK's current communication strategy is looking at how to address the issue of accessibility for female callers. This is particularly important as fewer women own phones than men in Papua New Guinea (DHSS 2018).



Significantly larger increases in calls amongst young people

There has been a 128% increase in calls from 11- to 15-year-olds, a 150% increase from 16- to 20-year-olds. This compares to an 89% increase amongst 26- to 40-year-olds. This pattern holds across both male and female callers. In response to COVID-19 the Helpline expanded its services to meet the needs of children, by recruiting counsellors with experience in child focused support and increased promotions to this age group through partners and in schools.

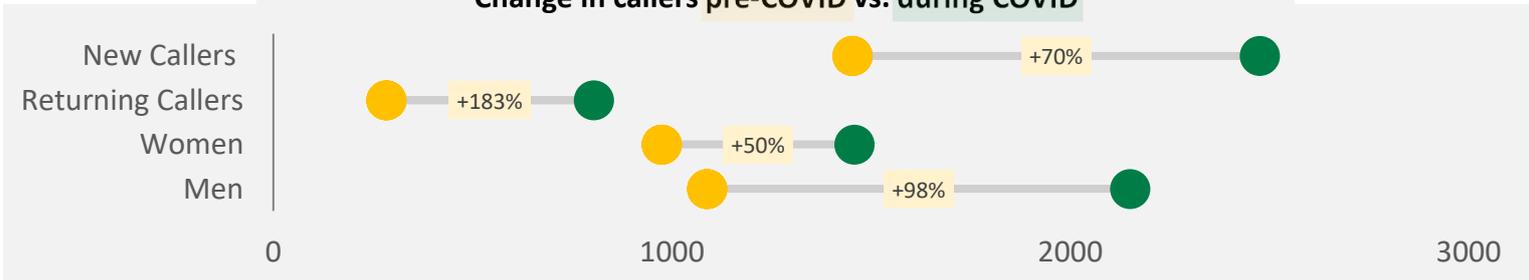


184% increase in returning callers

Of the three caller types (new callers, follow up and returning), returning callers increased by the largest amount during COVID (by 184%). This is in part due to callers who received information returning to the helpline, as well as due to expanded services. This is followed by a substantial increase in new callers (70%)



Change in callers pre-COVID vs. during COVID



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Are COVID information calls driving the increase?



The majority of COVID-19 information calls occurred early on

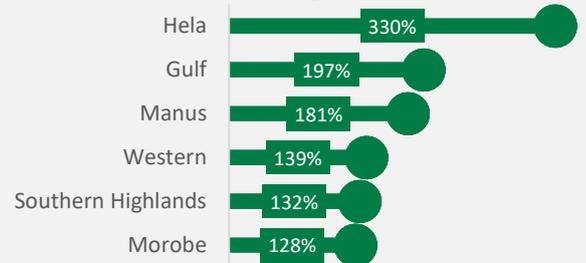
Of the 1282 calls received by 1-TOK asking for information on COVID-19, 1,120 of these occurred early in the pandemic (April to September 2020). Since October 2020, only 97 calls have been received about COVID. This is largely due to the setup of a national COVID hotline over time, and with visibility of the COVID-hotline increasing, 1-TOK received fewer 'COVID information calls'

Have calls changed in location during COVID?

Large increases in diverse range of regions

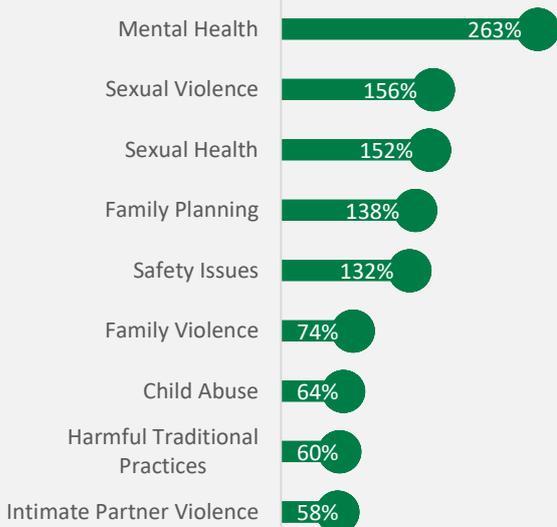
1-TOK received large increases in calls from Hela, Gulf, Manus, Western, Southern Highlands, and Morobe Provinces during COVID. Calls increased from all but one province (New Ireland), and in this instance the number of calls was low to begin (change from 26 per quarter to 17 per quarter).

Provinces with largest increases of calls during COVID



Have types of issues changed during COVID?

Issues with largest percentage increases during COVID



Huge increases in mental health and violence calls

Calls from many presenting issue types increased during the pandemic, with Mental Health calls increasing 263%. All but three categories increased during the pandemic. Sexual Violence, family violence, safety issues and IPV increased significantly.

This aligns with the global picture, where there has been an increase in mental health related issues and SGBV due to the primary and secondary effects of COVID-19. This also aligns with anecdotal data in PNG where mental health issues appear to be on the rise.

Harmful Traditional Practices on the rise

There has been a 60% increase in harmful traditional practice related calls (up from 29 calls on average per quarter pre-COVID, to 47 during COVID). This encompasses sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV). Sorcery accusations are mostly against women and girls. Escalations in violence can be triggered by stigma and misinformation around COVID-19.

Caveats

All cases within this period were considered for this analysis. The helpline data does not represent the prevalence rate of issues in PNG. Even in high resource contexts where there are higher rates of reporting and functioning referral pathways, under reporting is a persistent issue.

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