



Nightline Caller Statistics

2020-2021





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NIGHTLINE ASSOCIATION

We Listen, Not Lecture

Welcome to the Nightline Association Caller Statistics Report for 2020-2021, in which we provide insight into the invaluable support Nightline Services have provided student during the academic year.

With thousands of listening volunteers providing life-saving, out of hours, listening support at over 30 universities across the country, I'm incredibly proud to share the statistics from the 2020-21 academic year.

The statistics from this academic year speak to one of the most unusual and challenging times that Nightline Services have faced in the last 52 years. The coronavirus pandemic had an immediate impact on student life, and the Nightline movement. We could no longer offer services in the same way. The majority of Nightlines were forced to reduce the number of services they offered and almost a third of Nightlines had to close completely during that time.

Despite these challenges, all the Nightlines across the country went above and beyond to support their student communities and to ensure that listening support was available to those who needed it the most.

It's the dedication and passion of our listening volunteers that meant Nightline Services were able to remain open, on average, for two thirds of the academic year.

The pandemic had a profound impact on student life, from the way students learn, socialise and access resources to the challenges and hardships they face. The data and insights in this report shows that Nightline Services have adapted to support the new challenges of student life and continue to deliver against our core vision as a charity.

A huge amount of gratitude and thanks goes to everyone who contributed to Nightline in 2020-21. Thank you to our volunteers, partners, and supporters who continue to drive Nightline forward and ensure that students have someone there to listen to them at night, when other forms of support aren't available.

Executive Summary

Each year Nightline Association collects call statistics from Nightlines across the United Kingdom. This data is collated to demonstrate the impact Nightlines have in the area of student wellbeing and help identify areas in which the Nightline Association can provide further training and guidance.

Here we have collated call data from 23 Nightlines from the academic year 2020-21. From this data we have summarised trends in topic, duration, source and gender.

We responded to **9352** calls in 2020-21

- + **26.4%** were taken by phone
- + **66.8%** were taken by Instant Messenger
- + **6.8%** were other contact sources

Nightlines were open on average **175 days of the year**, meaning that this equates to roughly **53 calls each night**.

It's such a valuable service, and peer-to-peer talking can be so much less intimidating and indeed more helpful for it."

ANONYMOUS
CALLER



Topics

The most common topics discussed were **stress and anxiety** (10.9%), **academic issues** (10.4%) and **mental health** (10.4%).

Topics such as **sex concerns, sexuality** and **sexual health** were more likely to be discussed in phone calls.

Topics such as **academic stress, loneliness** and **mental health** were more likely to be discussed in instant messenger.

There was an increase in **loneliness** and **academic stress** related calls compared to previous years.

Duration

The average phone call duration was **25 minutes** and the average duration of an instant messenger call was **38 minutes**.

Gender

Where recorded/ known, male callers contacted Nightline services most frequently.



The Nightline Association

The Nightline Association was established in 2006 as an umbrella charity to support, promote and develop university Nightline Services. Our roots as 'National Nightline' date back to the 1970s and our vision and mission haven't fundamentally changed since the first Nightline Service opened. There are now 34 active Nightlines in the UK offering listening services to around 1,500,000 university students.

Our Vision

For every student to have access to the support offered by Nightline services so that:

- + Every student can talk about their feelings in a safe, non-judgmental environment.
- + Fewer students have their education compromised by emotional difficulties.
- + Fewer students die by suicide.

Our Mission

To raise the quality, profile, availability, and accessibility of Nightline services so that every student is aware of and has access to confidential emotional peer support and the opportunity to volunteer for a Nightline.

What We Do

We provide over 30 services directly or indirectly to Nightlines and, in some cases, their service users (students).

We also provide Nightlines with (non-legal) counsel and guidance through sharing packages of policies, processes, procedures and training courses.

Finally, we advocate for the Nightline movement through partnerships and communication with the general public and the private, public and voluntary sectors.

- + We Provide Services for Nightlines to Operate
- + We Guide Nightlines During Setup, Operation & Closure
- + We Advocate for the Nightline Movement
- + We Create Opportunities for Development & Partnership for Nightlines

The Impact of COVID-19

1.2% of calls to Nightline services in 2020-21 referenced COVID-19 as a topic. However, COVID-19 also had a significant impact on the day to day running of Nightline Services.

As this report demonstrates, the impact of COVID-19 on the potential services offered by Nightlines was significant:

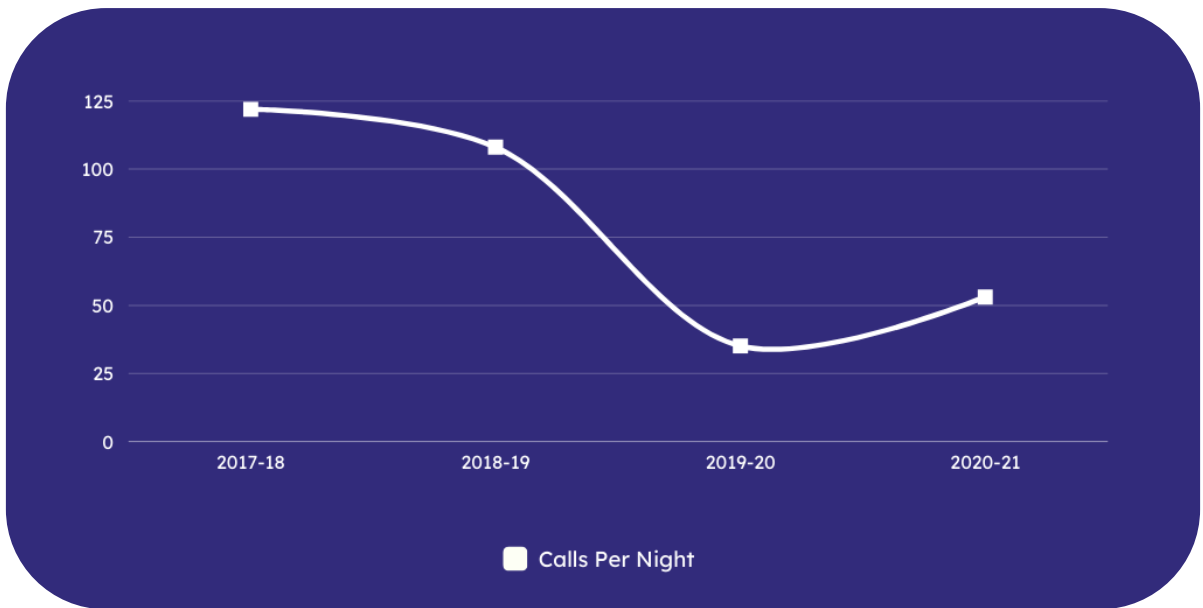
- 20 Nightlines reported that they were forced to reduce the number of services they offered.
- 11 Nightlines reduced the number of nights they were open.
- 14 Nightlines reduced their opening hours.
- 6 Nightlines reduced the number of volunteers on shift.
- 10 were forced to close for a period throughout the year.

“It’s been an extremely positive experience. The training we receive is so rigorous that I felt comfortable taking calls from the first day. The support system has been fantastic too. Not only are the other volunteers lovely people, but they are always there for you if you need to talk which I think holds the organisation together perfectly”

LISTENING VOLUNTEER

Results Breakdown

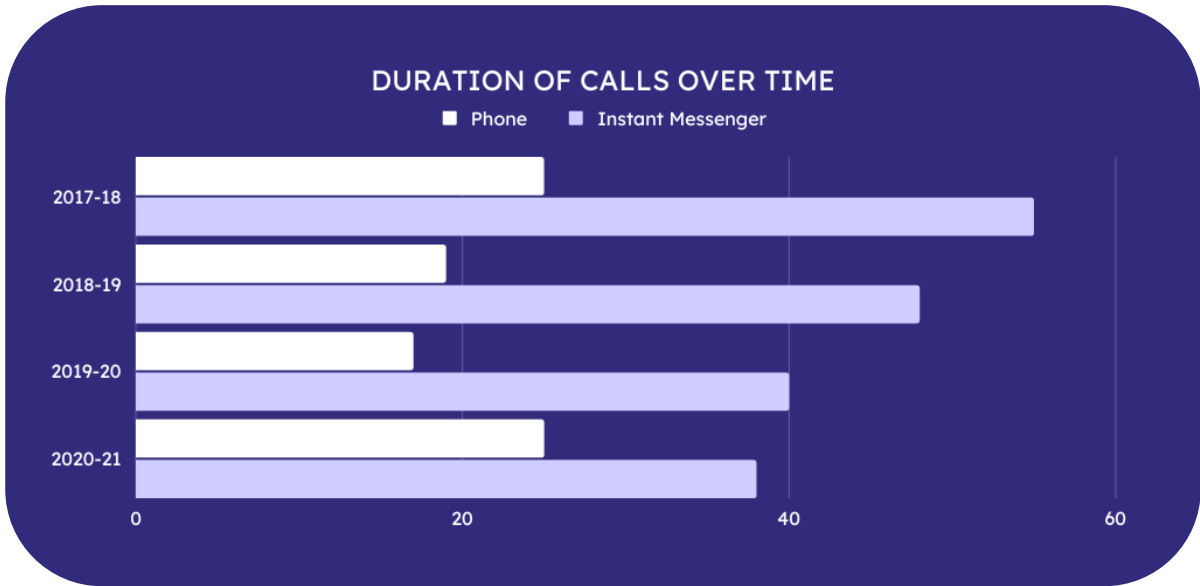
The 23 Nightlines who have provided their data took a total of 9,352 calls in the 2020-21 year (including all types of call from the data submitted).



Implications

Given that nearly half of the Nightlines were forced to reduce the number of nights they were open (11) and a majority (20) reduced their service, Nightlines were open on average 175 nights a year, representing 53 calls per night.

This is a significant decrease in the number of calls from previous years. However, it does mark a significant increase since the pandemic began, suggesting that Nightlines were more able to adapt to provide services in the 2020-21 academic year than 2019-20.



Duration of Calls

We received duration data for 2020-21 from 23 Nightlines, which constitutes a sample of 9,352 calls totaling 24,4957 minutes (including hang-ups and silent calls).

In line with historic trends, IM calls are much longer (an average of 38 minutes) than phone calls (an average of 25 minutes).

As we do not have raw data for all 23 Nightlines it is not possible to accurately present the average duration of calls excluding the 1006 hang-ups and 1270 silent calls.

As very few Nightlines offer other services (e.g. text/ email) and these are greatly varied across organisations, it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions from the average duration of other contact sources.

The year 2020-21 therefore supports the general trend found in the last four years of data collection, that Ims tend to last longer.

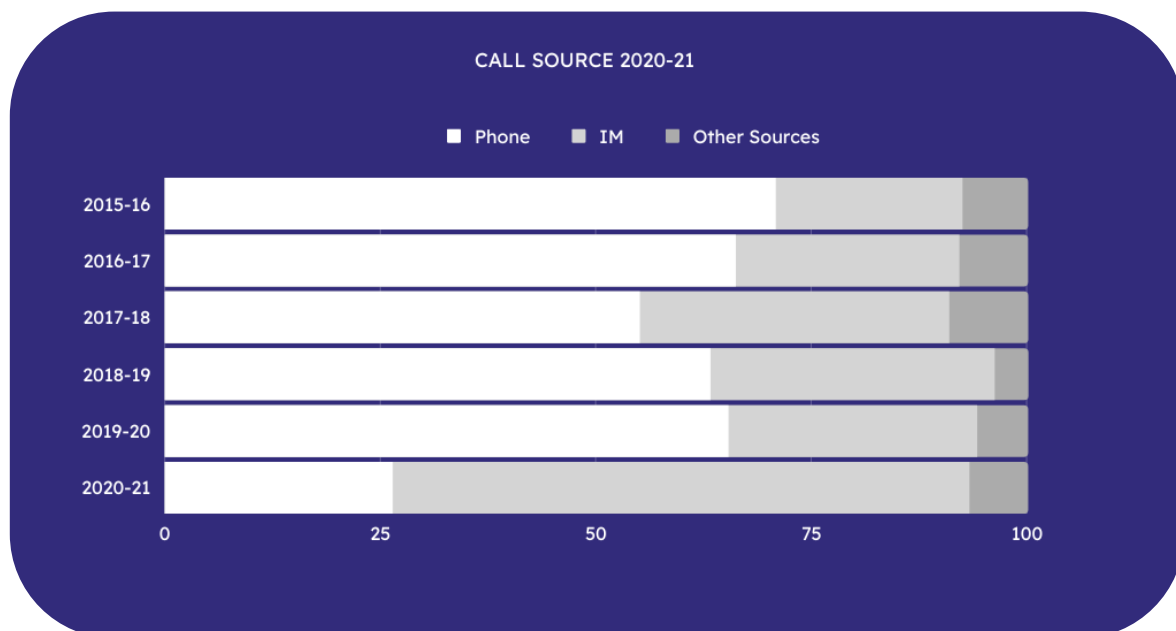
Call Source

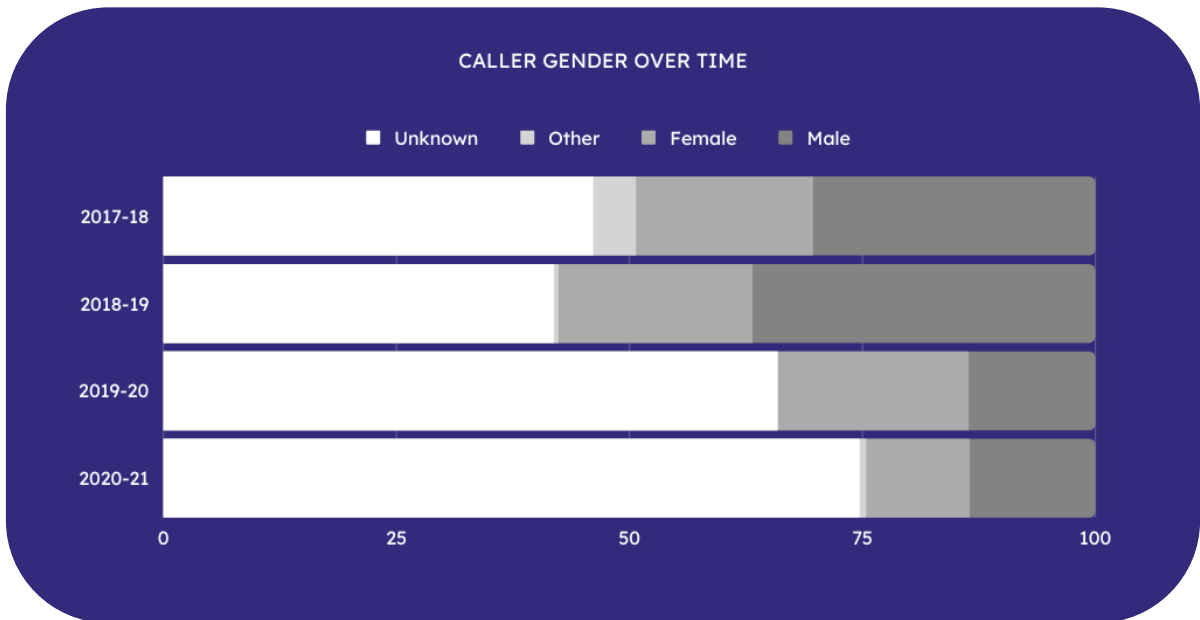
In the year 2020-21 all Nightlines offered an instant messaging (IM) service whilst 16 were able to offer a phone line at some point throughout the year. Therefore, IMing being the most popular choice for contact (at 66.8%) makes sense.

Other contact sources (such as drop-in meetings, text messaging and emails) were offered by few services and with great variety such that they cannot be meaningfully analysed here. In addition they are counted differently by different service providers (e.g. an email chain could be counted as one contact, or as separate contacts).

Change Over Time

Through comparison with data analysis carried out across the last 5 years, we were also able to draw comparisons between call source variation over a longer time period. This marked a significant change since pre-pandemic times as IMing took over as the most popular contact source for the first time.





Gender

Of the 23 Nightlines, 14 Nightlines record the gender (or assumed gender) of the callers. As a large number of calls are taken via text-based methods (IM or Text) gender cannot always be determined unless specified by the caller. Some volunteers may also choose to not assign a gender to a caller unless the caller states their gender within the call. Therefore the majority are unassigned.

This data demonstrates that 13.5% of callers have been identified as male with fewer female callers (11.1%). In addition a small minority (0.7%) were identified as another gender.

Change Over Time

Male callers have consistently been the most represented in reported gender of callers, which is supported in 2020-21 data analysis too. 2019-20 disrupts this trend, but data on the gender of callers was particularly scarce in this year, so it is not an accurate comparison.

This year also marks an absence of other genders in comparison to previous and later years.

Topic

The most common listed topics for calls were silent calls (13.3%) and hang-ups (10.7%). Excluding these, the 23 Nightlines took 7,076 remaining calls, from which data analysis by topic was carried out.

Of all the calls assigned a category, the 10 most common were:

- Stress/ anxiety (10.9%)
- Academic issues (10.4%)
- Mental health (10.4%)
- Loneliness (7.4%)
- Friendships (6.6%)
- Relationships (6.5%)
- Depression (5.3%)
- Suicidal thoughts (5.1%)
- Family (4.8%)
- Information (4.1%).

It is important to note that individual Nightlines do not collect data for all topics or some Nightlines assign more than one topic to a single call, so this may not fully represent all topics discussed.

COVID-19

This is the first year that COVID-19 was listed as an option for call topic. In 2020-21 it represented 88 calls, or 1.21% of calls excluding hang-ups and silent calls. This places it as the 22nd most frequent call topic, above insomnia (1.11%).

However, by comparison to the Samaritans report of the same year (20%), Nightline callers appear to be significantly less concerned than the general population.^[1]

“Not long after a death in the family, I remember not being able to sleep and feeling very blue. I wanted to stop feeling so lonely but didn’t want to wake my housemates, so I just rang Nightline and didn’t say anything. They stayed on the line with me as long as I needed, and it helped me feel a little more at peace.”

ANONYMOUS CALLER



Stress & Anxiety

The most common call topic reported in 2020-21 was stress/anxiety. This represented 950 calls or 10.9% of calls excluding hang-ups and silent calls.

This continues a significant trend of increasing student stress and anxiety, since this call topic was first listed as an option for data analysis in 2018-19.

The year 2020-21 saw a sharp decrease in the number of abusive calls with only 34 being reported across all 23 Nightlines. As abusive calls were more common by phone calls than any other contact (19 phone calls to 11 IMs despite IMs being more than 65% of contacts) this may be due to the closure of most phone lines in 2020-21. This may be something to monitor over the 2021-22 year as more NLs return to taking phone calls.

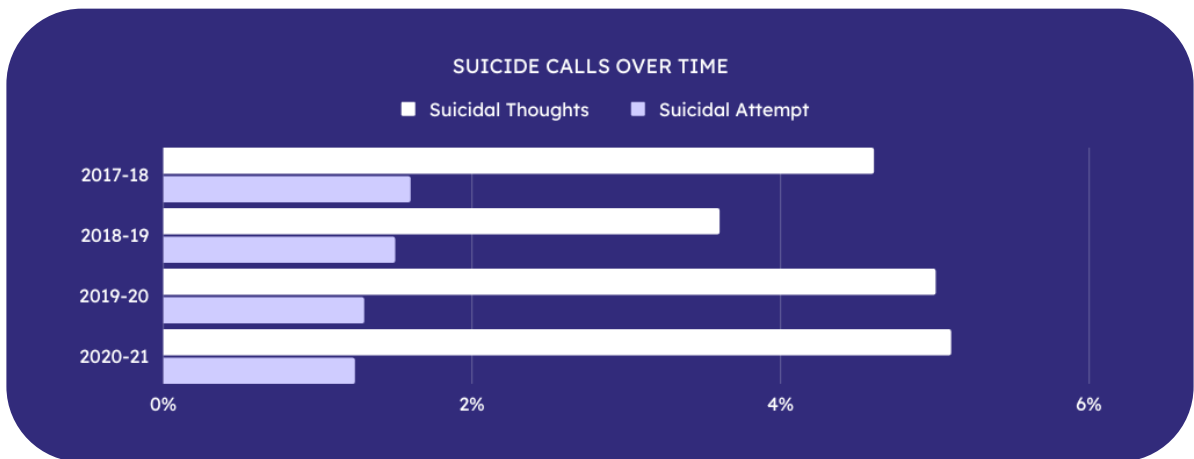
Abusive Calls

Nightlines across the country receive abusive calls. These are defined as those in which the caller is not genuinely seeking support or a listening ear. They encompass sexually manipulative calls as well as those in which the wellbeing of the volunteer is threatened amongst others.

Suicide Calls

From the academic year 2020-21, 495 calls were related to suicidal thoughts whilst 109 were suicide attempts. This follows the general trend of calls relating to suicidal thoughts, outweighing attempts, by up to 3x over the last 4 years.

There appears to have been some marginal decrease in the number of suicide attempt calls over this period. However, the broader calls topic of 'suicidal thoughts' has increased.



Key Findings

Overall, across the 23 Nightlines who provided data, there were 9,352 calls taken in the 2020-21 academic year.

As with previous years, a large number of the calls taken were related to stress/anxiety, academic issues and mental health.

In contrast to previous years, the majority of calls were taken via IM (66.8%) rather than by phone (26.4%) likely due to the number of Nightlines

which were forced to close or reduce their service throughout the pandemic. This was also the first year that COVID-19 was recorded as a call topic to be analysed on a national level, making up a significant proportion of calls (1.21%).

Methodology

All accredited Nightlines are required to keep logs to monitor the impact of their service. These logs are kept securely to protect confidentiality within Nightline services, and no identifying information is included in logs for reasons of anonymity and data protection. Calls are logged nightly, usually immediately after a call. A number of Nightlines use Nightline Association database software, Logbook (now integrated in Portal), while others use Excel or similar methods.

Nightlines had the option of submitting call forms with a summary of their data via e-mailing collated or raw data, google forms, or granting access to download their Logbook/ Portal data. Wherever possible, all 23 participating Nightlines are included in the figures. Any exclusions will be noted in the relevant sections.

Data Variations and Limitations

Call Source

All 23 of the Nightlines that responded offer an IM service, with 13 also offering an email service, one offering drop-in visits and 4 Nightlines offering other services such as Skype or Web Calls. Despite all Nightlines offering a phone line pre-pandemic, only 8 Nightlines were able to open their phone line at any point in 2020-21.

Emails are typically logged as a separate call for each email.

Due to the variation in services offered, it is important to also consider the number of Nightlines that offer each

contact medium when looking at the percentage of call sources.

Duration

22 Nightlines submitted information about call duration. Of these, 16 Nightlines included raw duration data whilst 6 included summary duration data. For this reason it is not possible to do any duration trends analysis related to the topic.

Gender

Gender is often unknown due to the anonymous nature of the service and not all Nightlines consider gender in their call logs. However, 14 Nightlines did send data about the gender of their callers where this was possible to identify.

“Nightline has had a huge impact on my life here at University. I’ve made so many new friends and developed lots of new skills. I don’t think my experience at uni would have been quite as good without it.”

LISTENING
VOLUNTEER



Acknowledgments

The availability of raw data from as great a number of Nightlines as possible is incredibly valuable in collating reports, measuring the impact of Nightlines and drawing conclusions from which we can inform future national policy in the sector.

Therefore the Impact Team would like to individually thank all 23 Nightlines who provided data for the 2020-21 year: Aberdeen, Bath, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Canterbury, Dundee, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Greater Manchester, Lancaster, Leeds, London, Newcastle, Norwich, Oxford, RGU, Sheffield, St Andrews, Surrey, Warwick, York.

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