



RCNI Data During Covid 19©

Together with Survivors: Rape Crisis Adaption and Transformation during Lockdown

July 2020

This document was created by RCNI using data from six Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) using the RCNI Data Collection System© and enabled by funding to support transparency from the Department of Justice and Equality:



INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The following data is a snapshot of Rape Crisis Centre services during the Covid-19 pandemic period of the 1 March to 30 June 2020. We compared this period with the same period in 2019 to demonstrate any patterns or changes. The report uses data from six RCNI member RCCs who use the RCNI Data Collection System©. As RCCs have been entering data into the RCNI system for over 15 years, there has been little disruption of this real-time data entry throughout the pandemic. The reason we have chosen to present data that covers the period beginning 1 March, is because we can see from the data that survivors and other service users began using the Helplines differently, as Ireland prepared for the prospect of lockdown and social distancing measures that were already happening in other countries who were at that point worse affected by the Covid-19 virus.

Funding and support from the Department of Justice and Equality have enabled RCNI to provide this data and ensure that RCCs will be able to provide a strong evidence-base to understand and advocate for changing survivor's needs, inform national policy responses and support Centres in meeting service demands in these unprecedented times. We present this analysis to support government in setting its priorities and activity and Tusla: the Child and Family Agency in their national planning remit.

Getting to a stage where we could create this report has required a number of steps, including:

- Convening online team meetings with RCNI and Data Collection Officers in RCCs,
- Reviewing how we collect data and what we collect,
- Making necessary database updates to ensure that we could capture client information that is presenting during the Pandemic,
- Devising strategies for data entry and practice whilst counsellors are working remotely, and
- Facilitating the collaborative analysis that helps us understand what this data may mean.¹

The six RCCs included in this report are:

- Carlow and South Leinster Rape Crisis Centre
- Kerry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre
- Mayo Rape Crisis Centre
- Rape Crisis Midwest
- Rape Crisis North East
- Waterford Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

RCNI and RCCs do not have all the information on the sexual violence experienced by these survivors, as some information is not always available. For this reason the n values vary between graphs.

¹ To facilitate timely availability of this evidence we are releasing it before the completion of the full RCNI cleaning process, which ensures that it is fully complete and verified by all RCCs. Therefore, this information is subject to changes.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

RCNI Data Collection System

RCNI has developed a highly secure online data collection system which allows authorised RCC personnel to log in and record specific information on each individual service user. This system is designed to equip RCNI to deliver comparable national data and simultaneously equip RCCs to, at any time, extract data regarding use of their own local service. RCC personnel do not record any identification details for service users or any other person. This data collection system has been specifically designed to collect data in frontline services dedicated to working with victims of sexual violence. RCNI has developed standards on data collection, data use and data protection which all RCNI database users must adhere to.













Categorisation

An important distinction to be aware of when reading this report is that between 'appointments' and 'helpline contacts'.

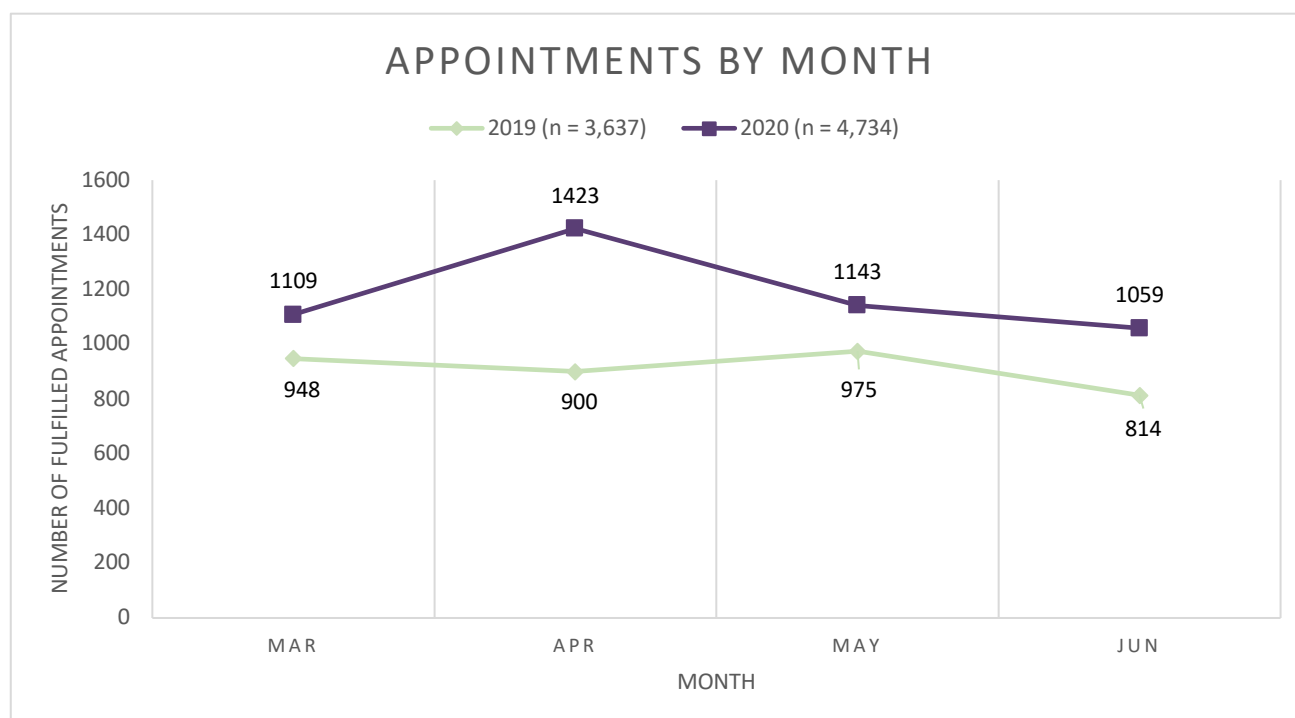
An appointment with a RCC is usually a face-to-face counselling/support session which takes place in the RCC main centre or in one of their outreaches. These are timetabled in advance and are usually one hour in length. During the working from home restrictions these appointments were instead provided remotely by phone and video calls. We have continued to collect the data of remote clients who would have ordinarily attended for face-to-face counselling and support under the categorisation 'appointments', just as we did pre-Covid.

A Helpline contact is any form of contact with a RCC by or on behalf of a survivor or supporter. This type of contact and how we recorded it did not change during working from home restrictions, as RCCs were able to reroute phones and access online services from home.

KEY DATA AND INCREASES/DECREASES BETWEEN 2019 AND 2020

	Appointments (Phone, video calls, face-to-face)	4,734
	Number of Appointments	+30%
	Helpline contacts (phone, text, email, social media, letter)	4,413
	Number of Helpline contacts	+23%
	Number of Helpline texts	+20%
	Number of Helpline voice calls	-18%
	Time spent on Helpline voice calls	+83%
	Hours spent on Helpline voice calls	367
	Number of survivors contacting Helplines	3,616
	Number of professionals contacting Helplines	539
	Number of Helpline counselling/support contacts	+98%
	Number of Helpline information contacts	+69%

APPOINTMENTS



During the period 1 March to 30 June 2020, **4,734 appointments were provided and fulfilled by RCC counsellors. This is an 30% increase** in appointments fulfilled in the same period in 2019. The majority of these appointments were provided over the phone, with others being offered by video call, and some in person before lockdown.

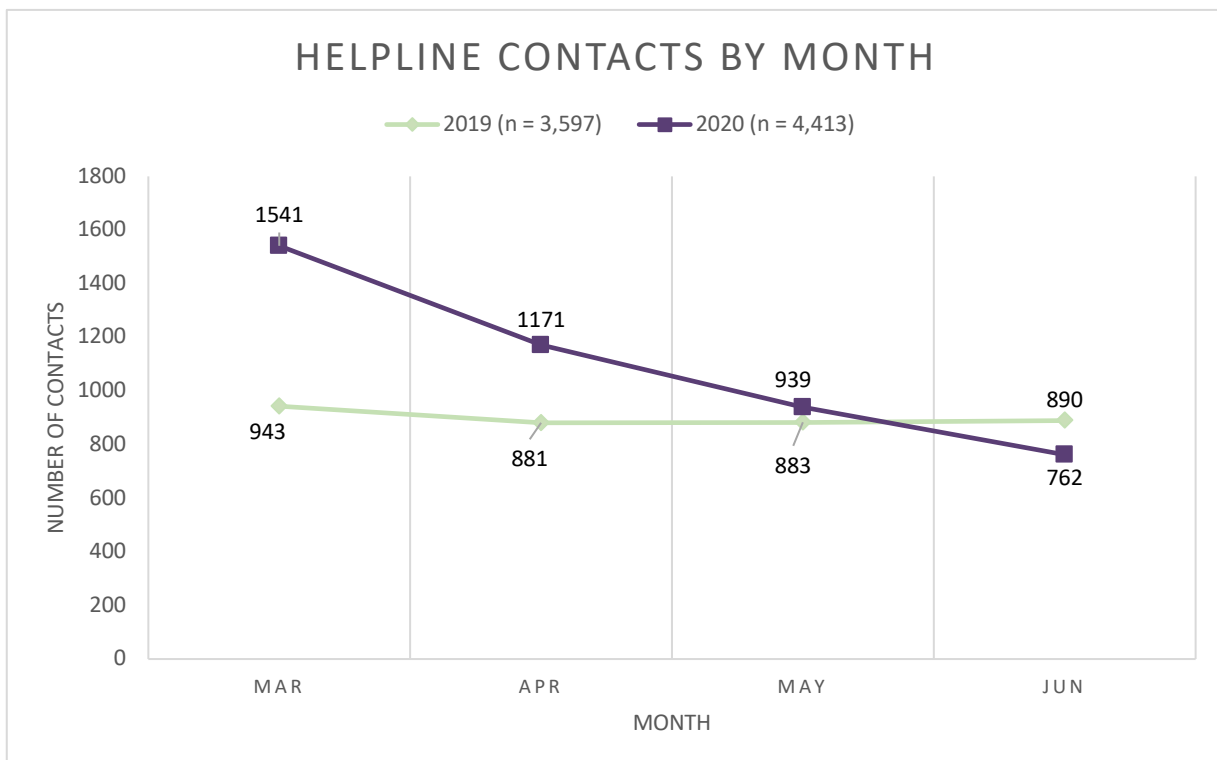
Providing counselling/support in a non-face to face environment has been challenging, however it has also served to remind us of our resilience in the face of crisis and how our rape crisis survivor-centred approach to service delivery remains dynamic and responsive to survivor need. Counsellors have been flexible in their working hours, with many on call 24 hours a day. We can see from the RCNI Data Collection System and from our ongoing collaboration with RCCs that counsellors rearranged counselling sessions to times that suited survivors. Many of these appointments have been taking place late at night and over weekends, which was often the only time survivors could carve out a private space for themselves in lockdown. Centres reported a low rate of attrition when moving clients from face-to-face to remote. Regrettably some survivors had to suspend their counselling at this time. This was primarily due to their living arrangements making it impossible for them to continue while stayhome measures were in place.

Dealing with the trauma of sexual violence, be it that which was perpetrated historically or recently, whilst also dealing with the impacts of the pandemic has required significant levels of strength and resilience from survivors. It may also have resulted in compounded trauma for some who have felt trapped in home environments, perhaps where the abuse may have taken place, or where the abuser is living close by. Some survivors found the remote counselling limiting in engaging with their deep trauma, some survivors found they adapted well to remote counselling, and indeed some were surprised by the strides they were able to make because they were remote.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

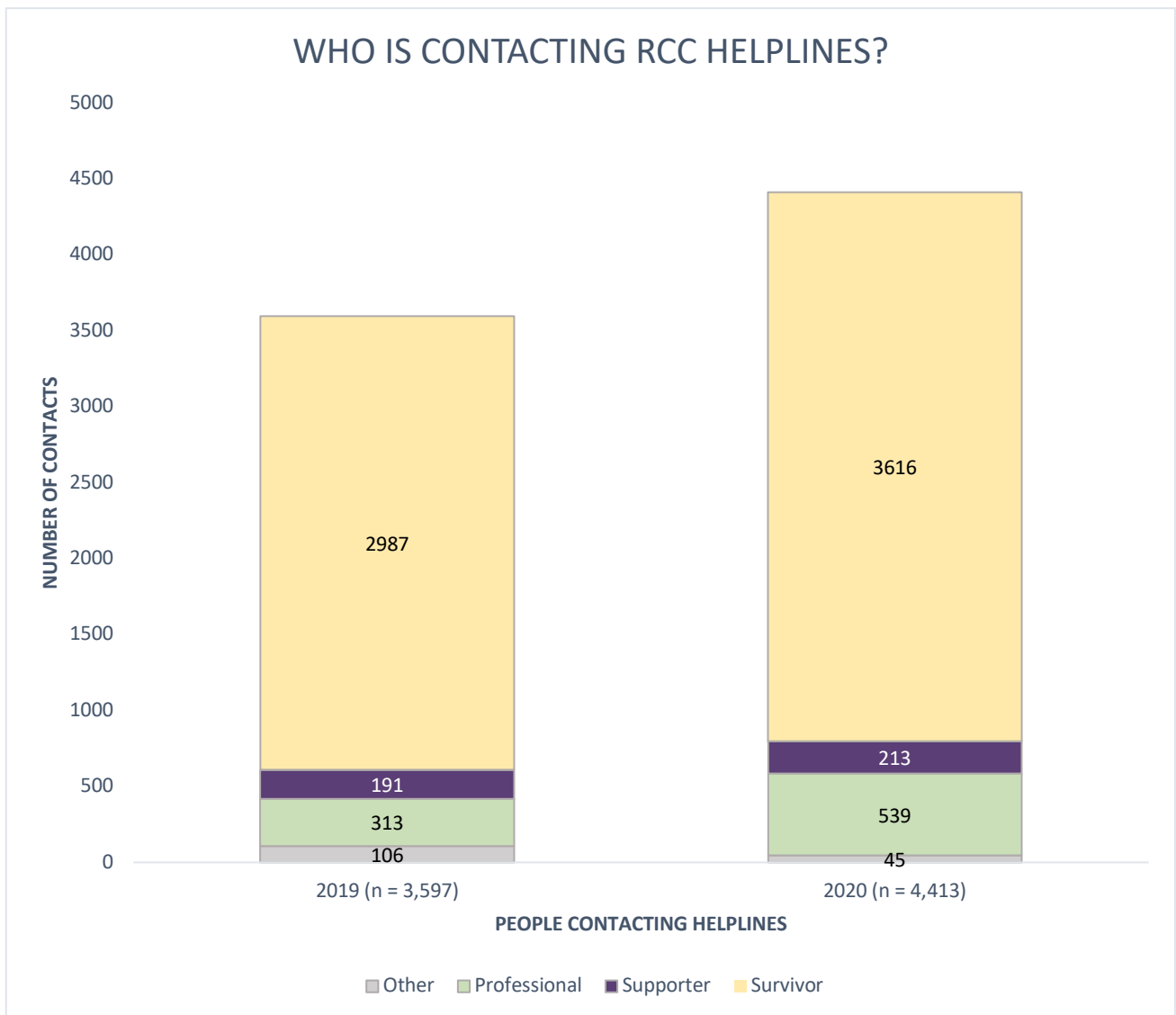
HELPLINE

During the period 1 March to 30 June 2020, **4,413 contacts were made with RCC Helplines**. These included phone calls, texts, emails, contacts through social media, and letters. This was a **23% increase in Helpline contacts** compared to the same period in 2019. When we examine this by month we can see that the largest increase in contacts was in March and this steadily decreased as the months progressed.



- The **largest increase in Helpline contacts took place in March (63%)**. We know that this was in large part due to RCCs rearranging service delivery, appointments with clients and offering information and reassurance of the continuation of service remotely to survivors, professionals, and others who rely on them.
- In **April the numbers of Helpline contacts were still 33% above** the same time period in 2019.
- In **May contacts were on a par with the previous year with a 6% increase**
- In June the number of Helpline contacts reduced significantly and was **14% lower than usage in June 2019**.

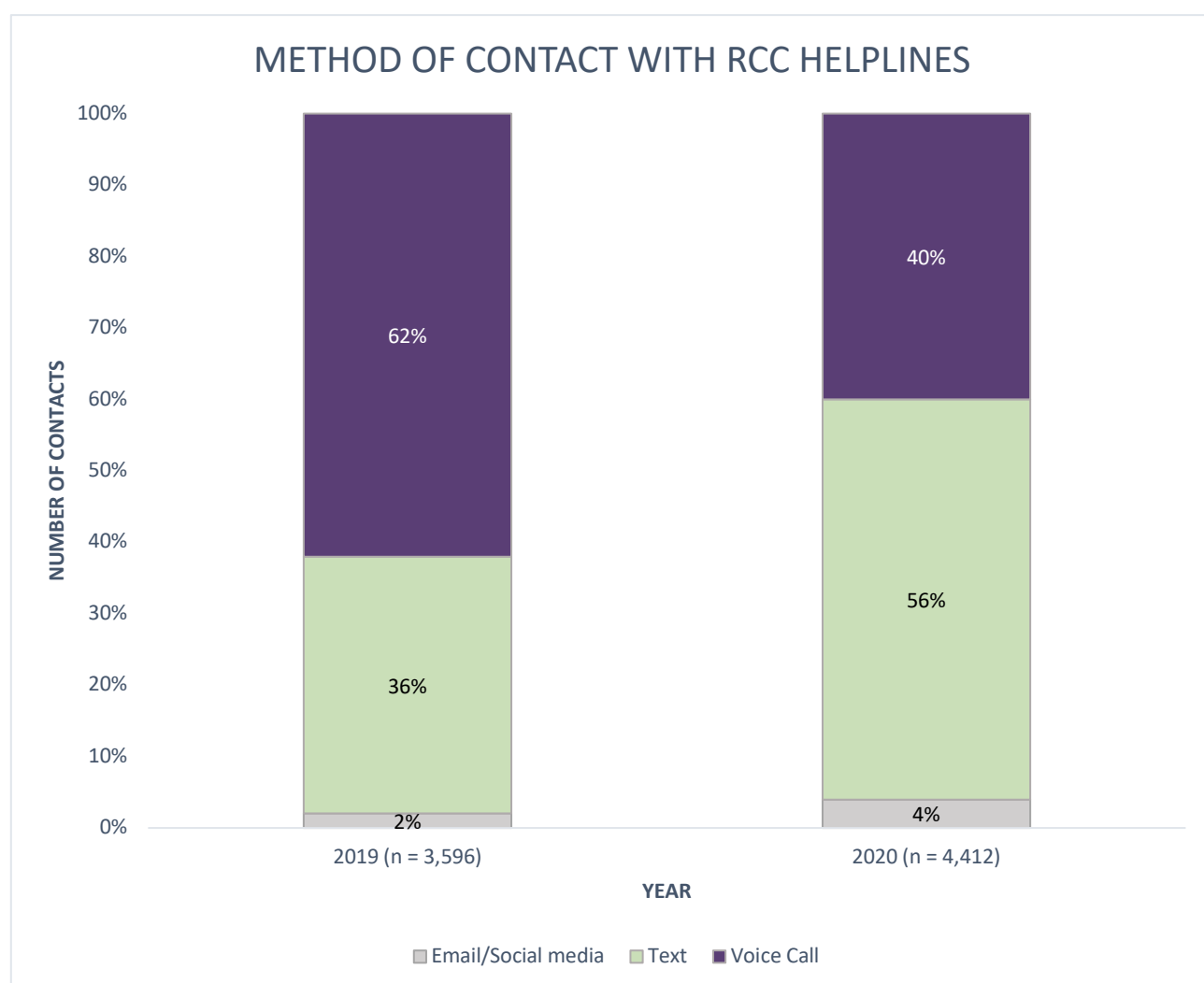
WHO IS CONTACTING RCC HELPLINES?



The majority of those contacting RCC Helplines are survivors of sexual violence.

- During the period 1 March to 30 June 2020, 82% or 3,616 contacts to RCC Helplines were from survivors.
- 12% (539) of contacts to RCC Helplines between 1 March to 30 June 2020 were from professionals.
- 5% (213) of contacts to RCC Helplines between 1 March to 30 June 2020 were from supporters.
- The remaining 1% (45) of those contacting RCC Helplines between 1 March to 30 June 2020 were classified as other.

METHODS OF CONTACT WITH RCC HELPLINES

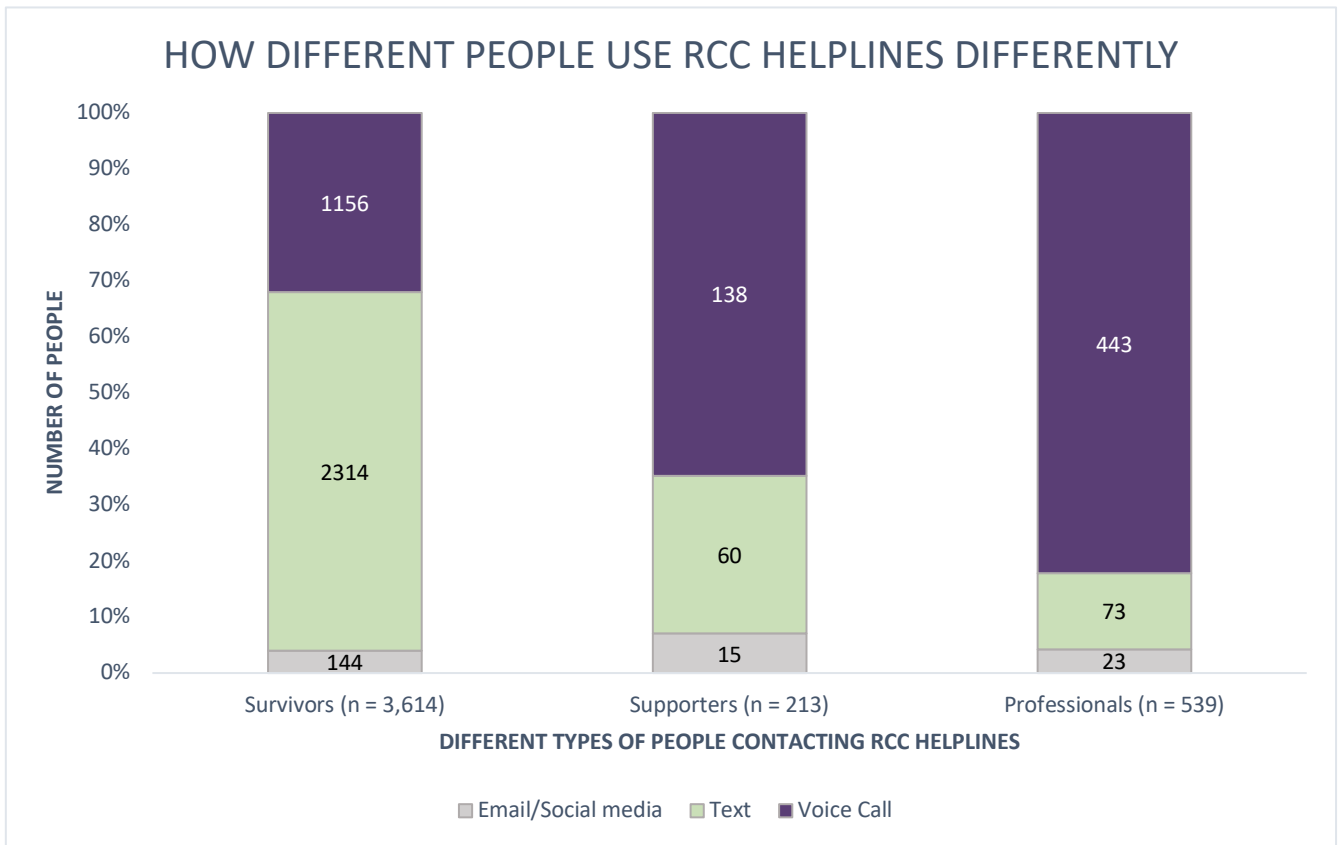


Voice calls and texts are the most common forms of contact used by those accessing RCC Helpline services. Although overall contacts are up by 23% we have seen a change in how people are using and accessing RCC services from the 1 March to the 30 June 2020 when compared to the same period in 2019:

- There has been an increase in the use of texts from 36% in 2019 to 56% in 2020.
- Voice calls made to RCC Helplines account for 1,772 of the overall contacts made between 1 March to 30 June 2020. This is a **reduction of 18% in the amount of phone calls** made in the same period in 2019.

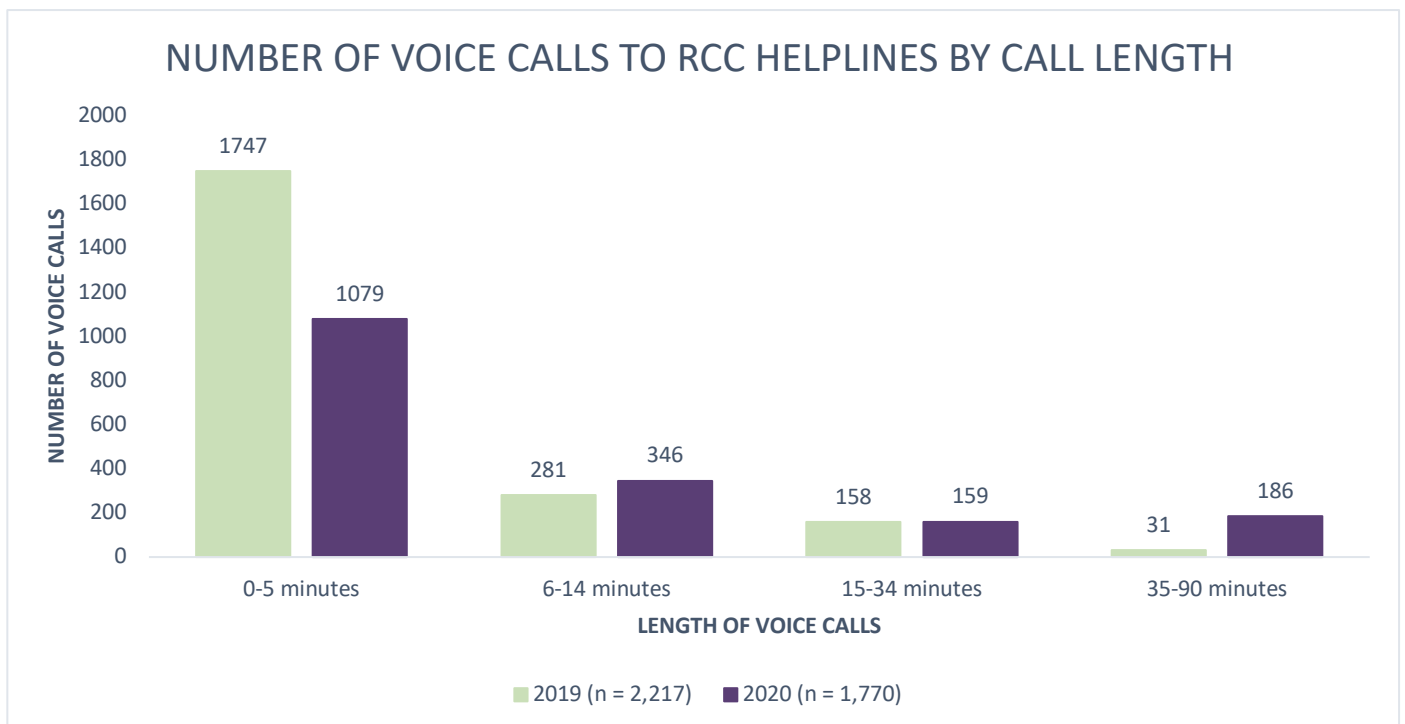
For the most part it is survivors driving this trend as we will see in the next section of analysis. There were also a small number of letters received by RCCs, but these have not been included in the analysis as the figures were too low.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)



We can see from the data that different people use the Helplines in different ways.

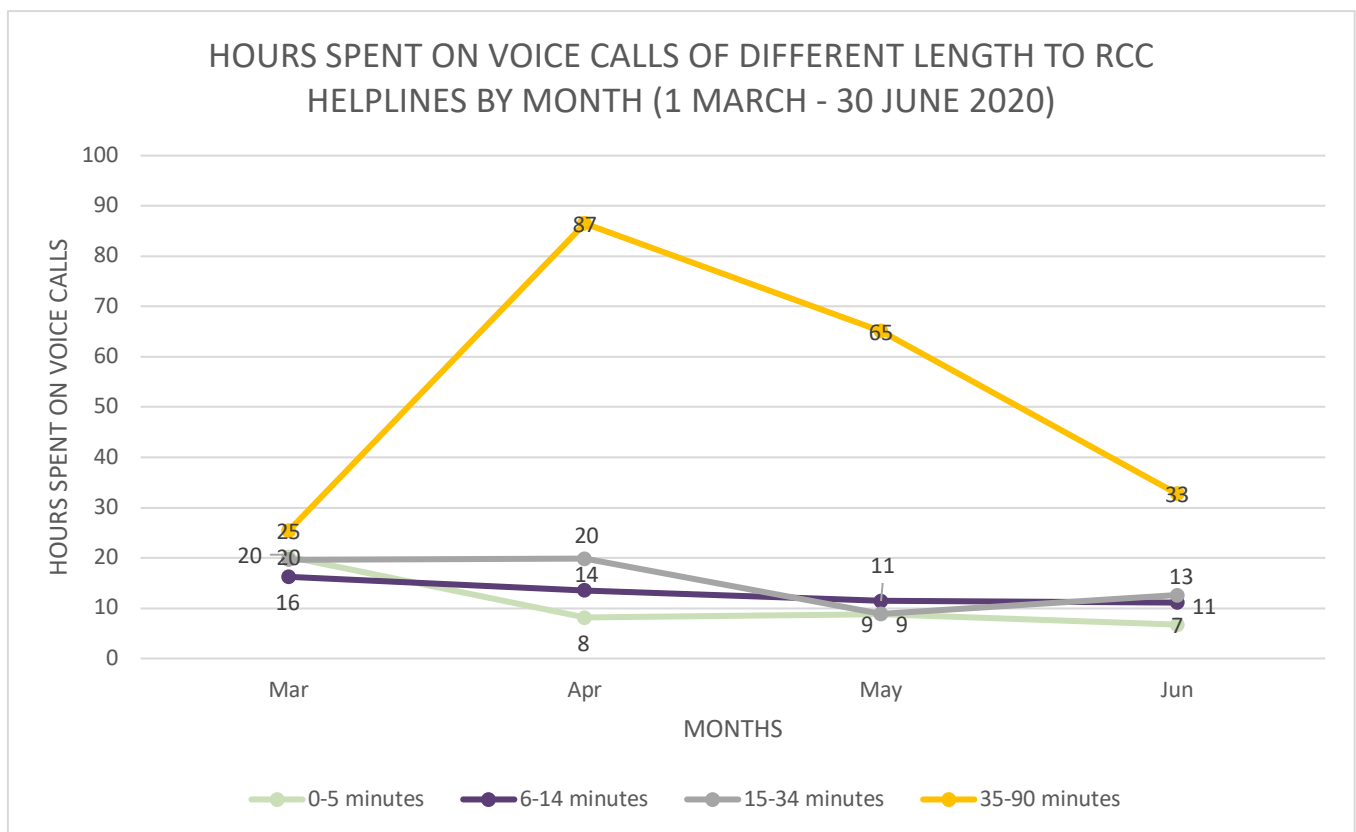
- Survivors favoured the use of text messages, followed by voice call.
- Supporters and professionals favoured the use of voice calls.



RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

Voice calls made to RCC Helplines account for 1,772 of the overall contacts made between 1 March to 30 June 2020. When we examine these voice calls further we see that although the overall amount of phone calls reduced, the **overall length of time spent on phone calls increased by 83% compared to the same period in 2019. RCC counsellors spent a total of 367 hours on Helpline calls in the period 1 March to 30 June 2020.**

Where previously calls may have been just a few minutes, many are now over 35 minutes, with calls of up to an hour and a half increasing five-fold when compared to the same period last year. This trend is also reflected in RCNI's direct service experience where our Legal Policy Director who provides legal support and advice directly to survivors reports a very similar picture. We will now explore this in more detail.



Overall we have seen a 83% increase in the length of time spent on voice calls to RCC Helplines. In the graph above we can see the number of hours spent on calls of varying lengths over the four month period in question. The biggest fluctuations can be seen in calls of 30 to 90 minutes in length:

- In March 25 hours were spent on calls of 35-90 minutes in length.
- In April this reached a peak of 87 hours spent on calls of 35-90 minutes in length.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

- In May calls of 35-90 minutes in length made up 65 hours of time spent on Helpline calls.
- And in June 33 hours were spent on calls of 35-90 minutes in length

WHY ARE THE NUMBER OF CALLS TO RCC HELPLINES DECREASING BUT LENGTH OF CALLS INCREASING?

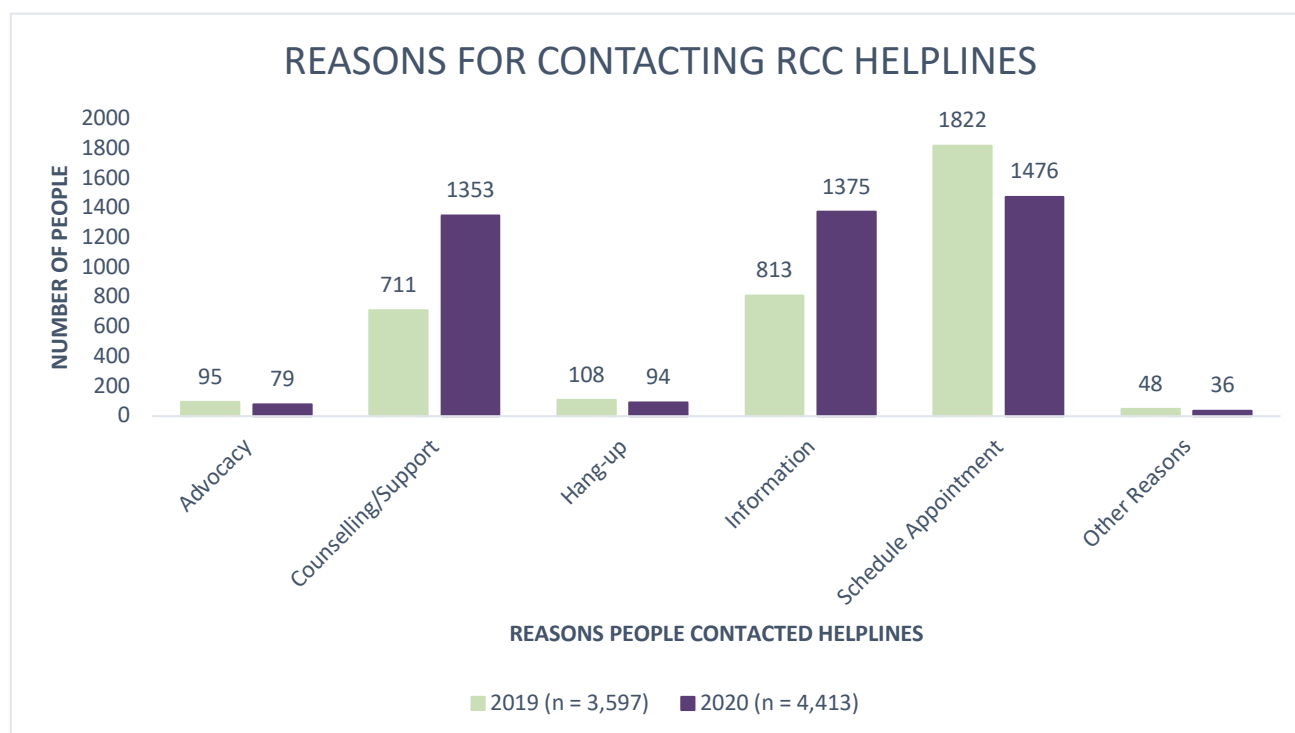
For the most part it is survivors making contact with RCC Helplines who are driving these trends in the decreasing number of calls and the subsequent increase in length of calls with the Helplines. These changes are of interest and we will be monitoring them further to understand what it means and if there is a long-term significance for provision of RCC services.

Currently we believe it is possibly due to a number of factors, such as:

- Survivors having more direct access to counsellors as they now have their direct phone numbers which decreases time spent on issues such as rescheduling appointments;
- Demands of stayhome measures resulting in the erosion or removal of survivors' coping strategies in dealing with pre-existing trauma;
- Increasing need for mental health resilience as a result of stayhome measures;
- Lack of opportunity to compartmentalise and hold boundaries on trauma of sexual violence;
- RCC staff working in flexible ways from home, also dealing with the Covid trauma themselves, making boundaries more elastic;
- Survivors immediate mental health needs being broader than and inseparable to their sexual violence trauma;
- Survivors delaying contact due to minimisation of their trauma and a sense of suspended reality that has come with measures to curb the spread of Covid-19;
- Schools closing and other care needs so reduced time for counselling and support for those who have children;
- In May, perhaps an anticipation of a return to face-to-face counselling imminently thus survivors with a preference for this waiting for this service to be available again;
- A lack of awareness publicly that services were still operating.

We have consulted with our Rape Crisis counterparts in Scotland, England, and Wales, and they too have seen similar trends.

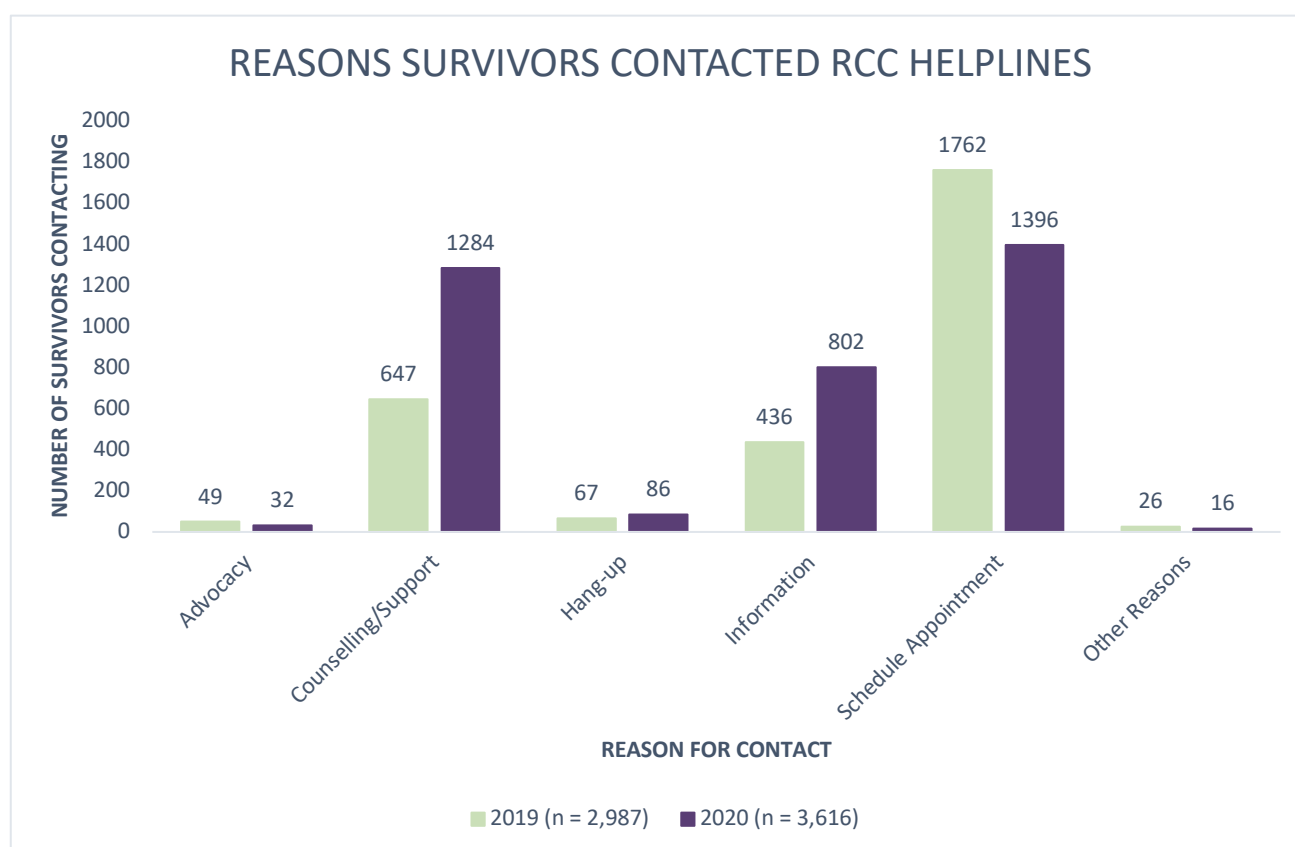
REASONS PEOPLE ARE CONTACTING RCC HELPLINES



Knowing why people contact the many RCC Helplines in Ireland is vital information which enables an evidence-based response to client needs. In the period 1 March to the 30 June 2020 results from the RCNI Data Collection System tell us that there was a **90% increase in the number of contacts for counselling and support** compared to the same time period in 2019. This correlates with the increase in number of survivors accessing Helplines and is analysed in more detail in the next section.

In the period 1 March to the 30 June 2020 we have also seen a **69% increase in the number of contacts for information**. This increase in people accessing the Helplines for information corresponds with **the 72% increase we have seen in professionals accessing RCC Helplines** during the pandemic period. This demonstrates the place that RCCs hold in their community as expert centres of knowledge on sexual violence, where they are relied upon as a key resource by many different types of individuals and organisations. An important aspect of RCCs work is enabling linking in and collaborating with community organisations in the areas they cover, which often span over multiple counties. There were slight reductions in the various other reasons people had for contacting RCCs.

REASONS SURVIVORS ARE CONTACTING RCC HELPLINES

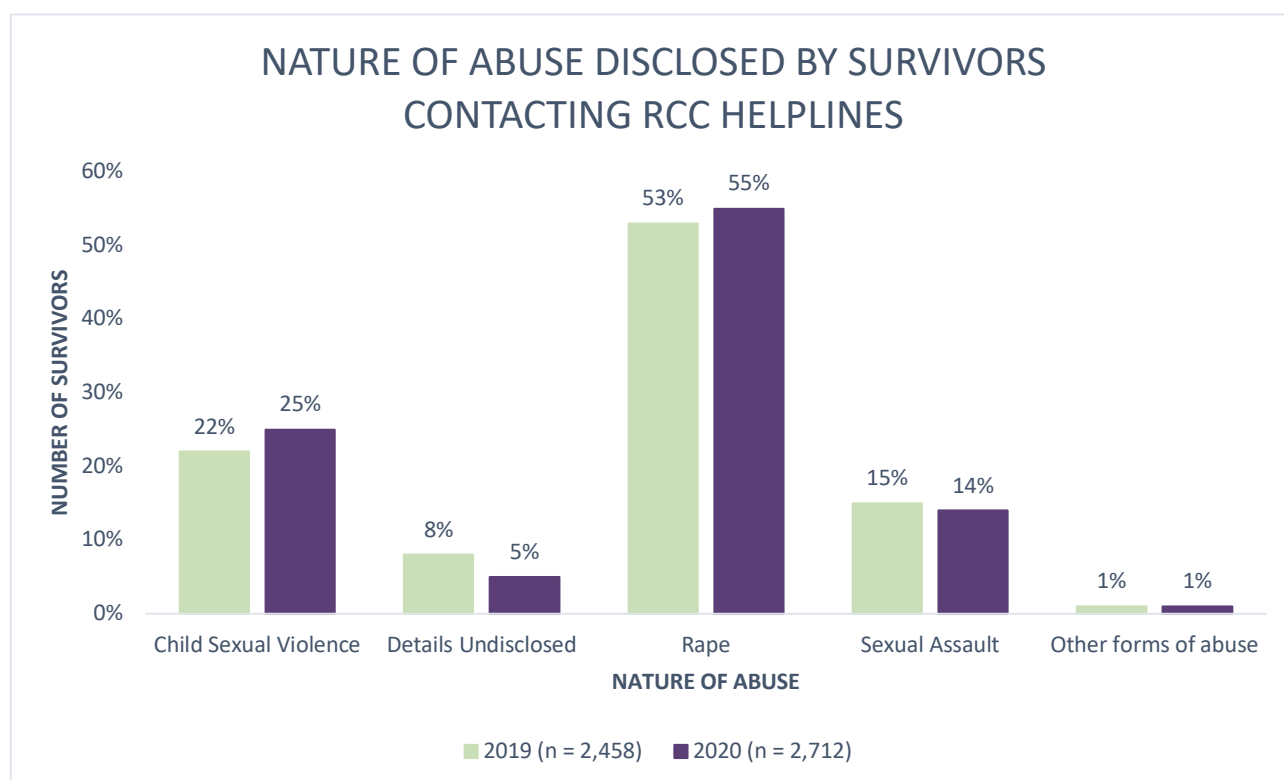


As survivors make up the vast majority of those contacting RCC Helplines, it is important that we examine their data in more detail:

- In the period 1 March to the 30 June **the number of survivors contacting RCC Helplines for counselling and support increased by 98%** when compared to the same period in 2019 (647 survivors in 2019 to 1,284 survivors in 2020). We can see from the data that this increase correlates with the increase in the overall number of survivors contacting the Helplines.
- We are also seeing a huge increase in the number of survivors contacting for information (84% increase from 2019 figures), and
- A reduction in time spent on scheduling appointments (21% decrease from 2019 figures).

These very significant changes in what survivors sought from us, and to which RCCs responded, need to be recorded and understood as they continue to change to ensure the type of capacity RCCs have is appropriate to meet survivor needs.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)



When we examine the nature of abuse that survivors are disclosing to counsellors on RCC Helplines between the 1 March to the 30 June 2020 we see similar patterns to those in 2019. When a person contacting an RCC Helpline does so for counselling/support, to schedule an appointment or for advocacy purposes we also record the nature of abuse if they chose to disclose it.

- The majority of survivors contacting RCC Helplines disclosed rape as the nature of abuse (55%).
- One quarter of survivors contacting RCC Helplines disclosed child sexual violence as the nature of abuse (25%). This figure is a combination of adult survivors coming to us for abuse in their childhood as well as children and young people coming forward for the first time about child sexual violence they have experienced more recently.
- 14% of survivors contacting RCC Helplines disclosed being sexually assaulted.
- 5% (123 people) of survivors contacting RCC Helplines between 1 March and 30 June 2020 did not disclose the nature of the sexual violence perpetrated against them.

Disclosure can be a difficult step for survivors. There are implications in naming the abuse in terms of accepting it was done to them and its impact, for many survivors they might carry self-blame or shame and for others they may fear the consequences of breaking their silence. A concern of RCNI's over the past number of years has been the negative impact that mandatory retrospective reporting has had on survivors' disclosing historic child sexual abuse and seeking help and support. We know of many cases where survivors of child sexual violence have withdrawn from, or refused to commence counselling, because of mandatory reporting.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

Survivors have told us that remote counselling and the helpline contact has had an impact on how they respond to their concerns around disclosure.

- Some survivors have said that it has been easier for them to describe events over the phone that they find very shameful as opposed to when face-to-face with a counsellor.
- Phone counselling has also given a greater sense of protection to some survivors as regards mandatory reporting, as counsellors may have no information on the survivors they're speaking with other than a first name. To facilitate access to support, services allow survivors to block their phone numbers and simply arrange to be the one making the phone call at the appointed time.
- RCCs increased the amount of appointments they offered throughout this period in order to support those most in need. This has meant increased opportunity to disclose abuse details.
- RCC counsellors have been extraordinarily flexible with their time during stayhome measures, both in their working hours and in the time they have provided to each Helpline call. This added resource may have given reassurance to the client that they needed to feel they could safely disclose. A follow-on impact for RCCs was how to protect their staff from burnout and exhaustion in order to ensure the continuation of the best quality response to survivors.

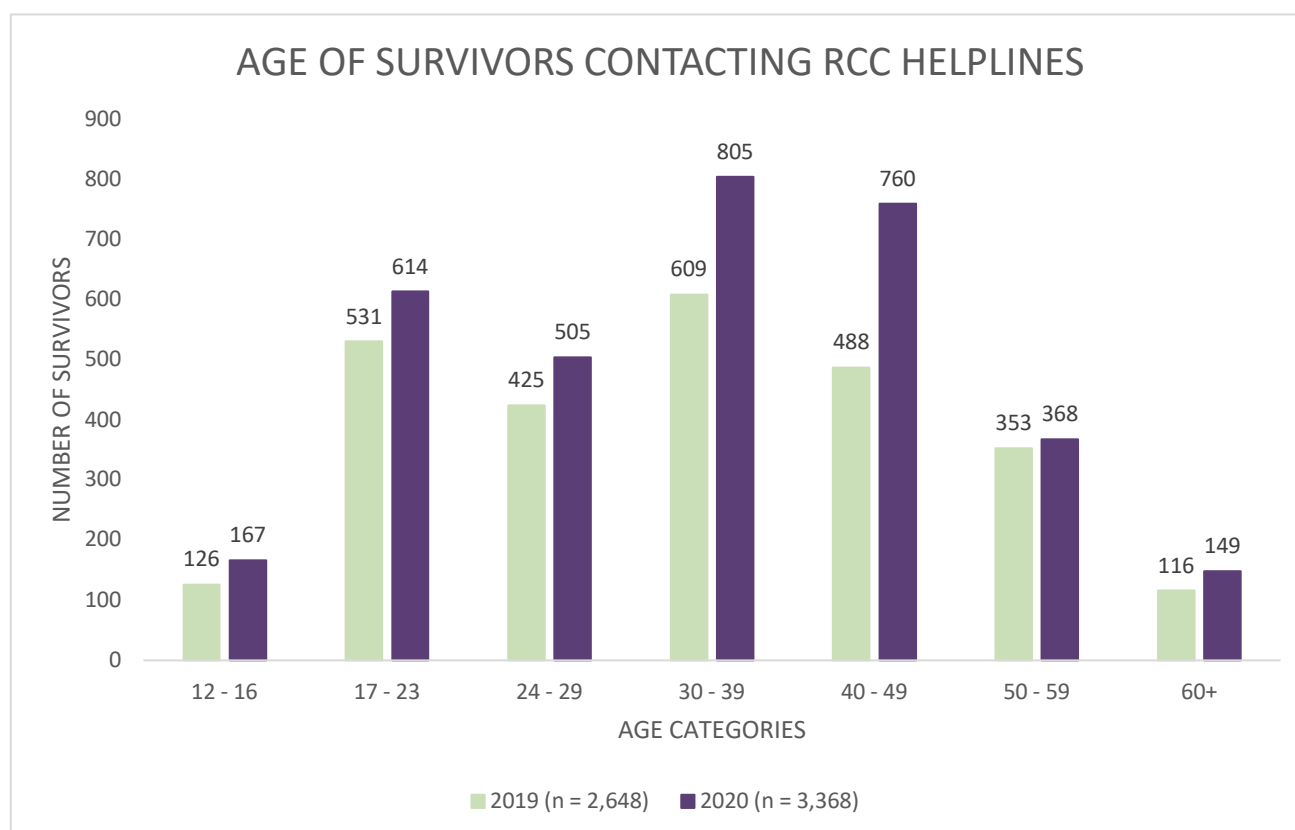
WHO ARE THE SURVIVORS CONTACTING RCC HELPLINES?

Gender of survivors contacting RCC Helplines



Our primary focus in RCCs is always survivors and their circle of support. When we examine the data closer, we can see a number of key pieces of information about our clients. **Approximately ten times more female survivors and supporters accessed RCC Helplines than males.** This figure has remained constant when compared to the same period in 2019. A small number of transgender and transsexual survivors also accessed services, with no significant differences in these figures either.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)



There have been increases in the numbers of survivors of almost all age groups accessing RCC Helplines. Most significantly we have seen an **increase of 272 survivors between the ages of 40-49 contacting us** during the Covid period when compared with the same period in 2019. From our conversations with RCCs we believe that this is in a large part due to the lockdown measures triggering past trauma in survivors. In some cases these survivors may have never disclosed the abuse to anybody, they may have compartmentalised it and locked the memory away in order to live their lives. In other cases they had attended RCCs or other support services in the past where they had worked to get closure on the abuse perpetrated against them, only to have this past trauma reactivated by lockdown measures.

We are also seeing a significant increase in children and young people under the age of 24 contacting RCC Helplines for support:

- **167 of the survivors who accessed our Helplines from 1 March to the 30 June 2020 were between the ages of 12 to 16. This is an increase of 47 survivors of this age group** contacting RCC Helplines when compared with the same period in 2019.
- **614 of the survivors who accessed our Helplines from 1 March to the 30 June 2020 were between the ages of 17 to 23. This is an increase of 83 survivors of this age group** contacting RCC Helplines when compared with the same period in 2019.

CONCLUSION

Combined with the returning clients, what we are looking at is a pattern of trauma resurfacing for people during stayhome, people moving into crisis with existing trauma and people disclosing for the first time.

There have been a few clients coming to RCCs disclosing recent sexual violence perpetrated during lockdown but we fear this number does not reflect the reality and it will be some time before these victims feel ready to seek support.

Many of the people disclosing for the first time in this period were children or young people. RCCs have also recorded a small but notable increase in survivors disclosing ritual abuse to counsellors during the Covid period. We also found that child sexual violence is now increasingly filmed and circulated online.

We need to examine this information and emerging data in more detail in the coming months if we are to respond effectively and ensure that we meet every survivor's need.

It seems clear to us that the increased service demand and delivery during lockdown will not revert to previous levels. Indeed, we believe we are seeing evidence of suppressed need which is yet to emerge. This will stretch the resources of the sector and must be planned for by government and the Child and Family Agency in terms of adequate budgets for 2021.

Special acknowledgement and gratitude is due to RCC managers, counsellors, staff and Trustees who within their own homes created a safe space for survivors to contact them and to continue offering the high level of support and care that RCCs are known for. At a time of shared great difficulty for every individual and family in the country, those working for RCCs doubled their efforts to meet survivor needs. We are grateful for the ready support of our government and statutory partners, in particular Tusla; the Child and Family Agency, the Dept. of Justice and Equality, An Garda Síochána and personnel in the Sexual Assault treatment Units. The RCC model and commitment to survivor-led care was stress tested and has clearly demonstrated its robustness and value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research to understand the relationship between the changing types of sexual violence and the prevalence and perpetration of sexual violence during stay-home.
- Secure statutory support for national data collection and analysis for NGO sexual violence services for which the RCNI Data Collection System is the proven and endorsed model [European Institute of Gender Equality \(EIGE\)](#), which will allow all survivors using specialist services the opportunity of a voice within this evidence base.
- Increased statutory funding and support for RCCs who have expended high levels of resources and energy during this crisis.

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

- Increased budget allocation for sexual violence services in budget 2021 to ensure we can meet demand that we anticipate increasing as restrictions ease.
- Clinical research into the efficacy of, and supports needed, for remote trauma work.

APPENDIX

COVID-19 IN IRELAND TIMELINE

- 29 February - First confirmed case of Covid-19 in Ireland
- 1 March - A secondary school in Ireland closes for 14 days after student confirmed to have virus
- 11 March - The first death due to Covid-19 in Ireland
- 12 March - Schools, colleges and childcare facilities ordered to close
- 15 March - All pubs, including hotel bars ordered to close
- 12 March - 23 March RCCs moved all services online and closed physical centres
- 24 March - All non-essential businesses ordered to close
- 27 March - non-essential travel restrictions in place

RCNI Data During Covid (1 March – 30 June 2020)

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Statutory funding for all RCCs comes predominantly through Tusla: the Child and Family Agency. All Rape Crisis Centres fundraise also.



RCNI core functions are funded through the Pobal SSNO funding scheme.

RCC contact details for support or donations can be found on:

www.rapecrisishelp.ie

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