Young helpline callers and difference: exploring gender, ethnicity and sexuality in helpline access and provision

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ABSTRACT
This article, which has its origin in a feasibility study carried out for three youth telephone helplines that work with young people who run away, focuses on gender, difference and helpline access by young people. During the research process the writers noted that for the three commissioning helplines, as is the case with the majority of other telephone helplines, approximately two-thirds of callers are female. A helpline for young Muslims where the gender access ratio was 50/50 stood out as being different in this respect. Until recently, literature on gender and help-seeking has tended towards making a blanket identification of males as experiencing difficulties in negotiating pathways to help. Although this difficulty of males is evident in relation to both help-seeking and access to helplines, our study suggests that, at least in relation to helpline usage, when we take culture, ethnicity and sexuality into account, the help-seeking situation may be more nuanced. This has implications in terms of enabling a cross-section of young people to access helplines as well as with regard to helpline service development.

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