



Crisis Support
through 13 11 14



Table of Contents

1. Background	2
2. Crisis support	3
3. Aloneness & social isolation	4–5
4. Supporting high risk groups	6
4.1 Those who are suicidal	6
4.1.1 Youth feeling suicidal	7
4.2 Youth	8
4.2.1 Youth with mental health issues	9
4.2.2 Abused youth	10
4.2.3 Youth struggling with their sexuality	10
4.3 Those with a mental illness	11
4.3.1 Women in treatment for depression	13
4.3.2 Those who have thoughts of suicide and a mental illness	13
4.4 Those experiencing workplace stress	14
5. Closing	16

1. Background

Analysis of a sample of Lifeline 13 11 14 call data in 2008/2009 highlights a number of serious crisis support issues that are addressed by this service. It demonstrates that vulnerable high risk groups such as those who are suicidal, socially isolated and experiencing mental illness are being supported through Lifeline's 13 11 14 service.

At times, Lifeline may be the only support callers access. Data indicates that Lifeline is trusted by the Australian community to be there, hear their story and support them to move forward.

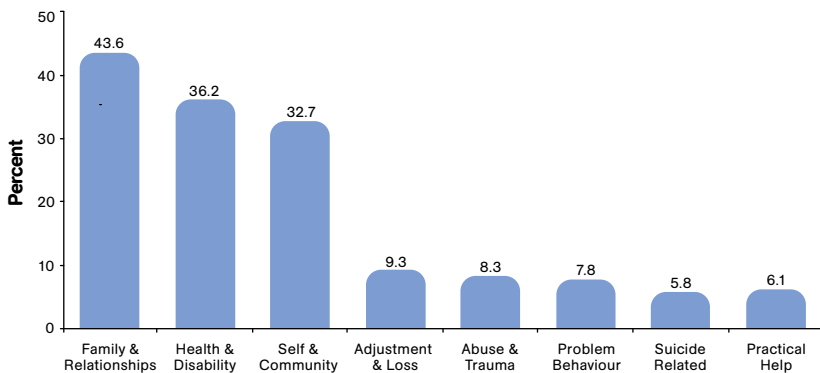


2. Crisis support

Crisis support is the core focus of Lifeline's 13 11 14 service. Typically, callers in crisis find that painful changes and/or problems in living are increasing their distress and overwhelming their capacity to cope.

Certain themes stand out in these calls. The three highest issues being raised by callers to Lifeline are generally 'Family & Relationships', 'Health & Disability', and 'Self & Community'.

All calls: Summary of issues



Being given a safe and non-judgemental forum for talking through problems helps reduce distress, increase safety and enhance coping. It helps callers find emotional support, an independent perspective and information about further resources. This support enables and motivates callers to act to improve their circumstances. Collectively, these benefits are important reasons why callers reach out to Lifeline.

Multiple issues are recorded for over half of all calls to Lifeline (56%). This highlights that Lifeline is often addressing the complex needs of callers to the 13 11 14 service; where calls may not be focused upon one single issue, but a multitude of complex and intertwining issues.

3. Aloneness & social isolation

It is apparent from the data analysis that Lifeline is supporting highly vulnerable groups through the 13 11 14 service, and may often be filling a service gap for these people. At times, Lifeline may be the only support mechanism being utilised by callers.

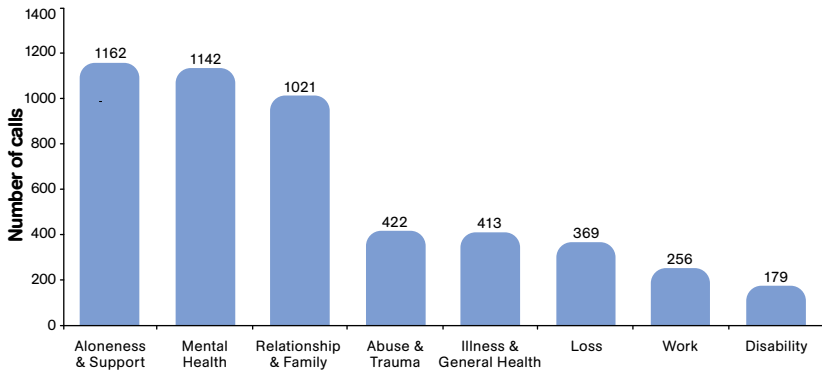
An over-riding theme coming through for many calls are feelings of being alone or being socially disconnected. Callers express a need for support in relation to these feelings by calling Lifeline.

Of those calls where the relationship status of the caller is known, 76% of calls are from people never married, divorced, separated or widowed. 41% are not in the labour force, 52% are living alone, and 14% express 'loneliness' as a key issue for them (and 23% of those calls are from people who were actually living with others). It seems that those in the community who do not have a strong sense of connectedness with others, are more likely to call Lifeline to discuss their life issues.

This demonstrates that Lifeline is supporting the needs of a vulnerable group of individuals who may be more susceptible to mental health issues such as depression, and those who may be more susceptible to thoughts of suicide. 54% of calls relating to the caller's mental health also concern 'Aloneness and Support'. In 33% of suicide related calls, 'Aloneness and Support' is the most frequently reported issue being raised alongside suicide.



Suicide-related calls: Aloneness & other issues



‘Loneliness’ is an issue consistently discussed at a higher rate for males aged 15-24 years than their female counterparts. When this is considered in light of the rate of youth suicide among young men, Lifeline is providing emotional support and early intervention for one of Australia’s most vulnerable groups for suicidality. It may be the case that men in particular find calling a confidential helpline such as Lifeline less confronting than seeking support face to face from a friend, family member, or professional. In talking through problems and gaining motivation to act in improving their circumstances, these vulnerable young men may not get to the point where they have thoughts of suicide.

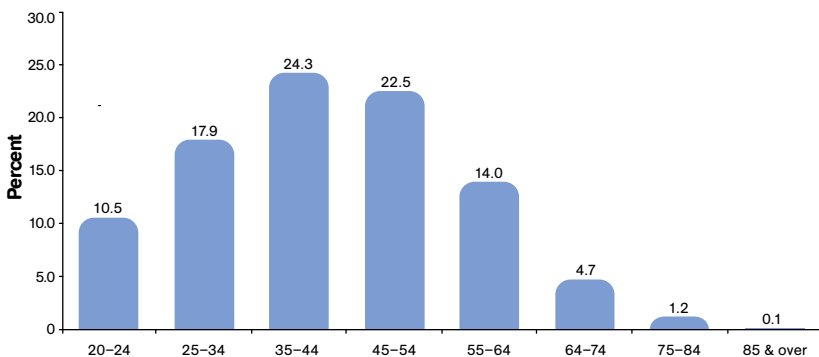
4. Supporting high risk groups

4.1 THOSE WHO ARE SUICIDAL

Generally, almost 6% of calls to Lifeline are identified as being suicide related. This translates to 45–50 calls per day.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that the highest age-specific suicide death rate for males in 2005 was observed in the 30–34 year age group, and for females this was observed in the 35–39 year age group¹. During the reference period used for data analysis, the highest number of calls taken relating to suicide were from the 35–44 year age group (24%), with almost 18% of calls relating to suicide from the 25–34 year age group. This demonstrates that Lifeline does support the needs of a high risk group for suicide; particularly for women, who make up an average of two thirds of Lifeline’s callers.

Suicide-related calls: Age



Almost 10% of suicide calls made to Lifeline require police or ambulance services to be contacted by Lifeline for an intervention to be carried out, demonstrating that Lifeline does play a vital intervention role in suicide prevention for Australians.

As mentioned, the three highest issues discussed by callers to Lifeline are 'Family & Relationships', 'Health & Disability', and 'Self & Community'. Lifeline believes that early intervention is vital to addressing these issues. By dealing effectively with these issues, we may be preventing someone from getting to the point of suicidal crisis.

4.1.1 YOUTH FEELING SUICIDAL

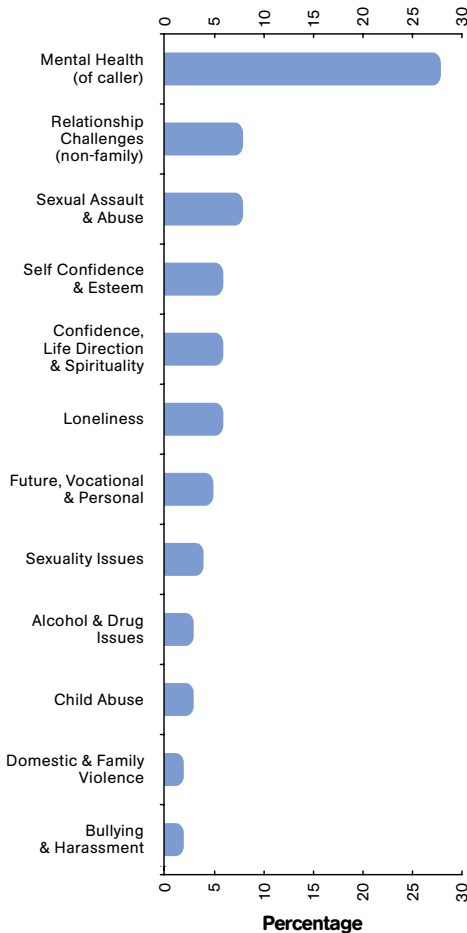
Almost 9% of those in the under 14 age group discuss suicide, and calls that are flagged as being of concern and that may require an intervention are highest for calls in the under 14 age group. These statistics demonstrate that Lifeline is capturing youth at their highest risk of suicide.



4.2 YOUTH

8% of calls to Lifeline are from youth (24 years and under). This amounts to approximately 40,000 calls from youth every year. It is clear that youth issues are often met by Lifeline's 13 11 14 crisis line, with significant relevance to mental health issues, abuse, suicide, and sexuality concerns.

Youth Caller Issues



4.2.1 YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Research has shown that 75% of mental health disorders begin before the age of 25 years, yet 70% of young people who experience mental health problems do not seek help². The most frequently discussed issue for calls received from 15–24 year olds to Lifeline is their own mental health (28%). This highlights that as a service provider, Lifeline is capturing a vulnerable youth group and providing confidential, and perhaps less intimidating support by telephone than other face to face services.



4.2.2 ABUSED YOUTH

Lifeline receives the most calls regarding 'Abuse & Trauma' from callers under the age of 14. The most recent national figures from the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (AIHW) indicate that in Australia, during 2007–08, there were 317,526 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect made to state and territory authorities - and this was only those cases which were reported. Although youth-specific helplines do exist alongside Lifeline's 13 11 14, it is clear that abused youth are still utilising Lifeline as a support mechanism when the need to discuss abuse arises. Similarly, the issue of 'Sexual Assault & Abuse' is also discussed the most by calls received from females aged 20–24 years (24%).

4.2.3 YOUTH STRUGGLING WITH THEIR SEXUALITY

For young Australians, sexuality is a significant issue affecting their mental health and wellbeing. Young people who experience same-sex attraction and alternate gender identity are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues³ and facing suicidal thoughts.

According to Lifeline's data, the issue of youth struggling with their own sexuality is an issue we address for young men in particular. Males aged 15–19 years discuss their own sexuality (10%) significantly more than females in the same age group (3%). Sexuality is the second highest issue being discussed by 15–19 year old males, the first being their own mental health (14%).

4.3 THOSE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

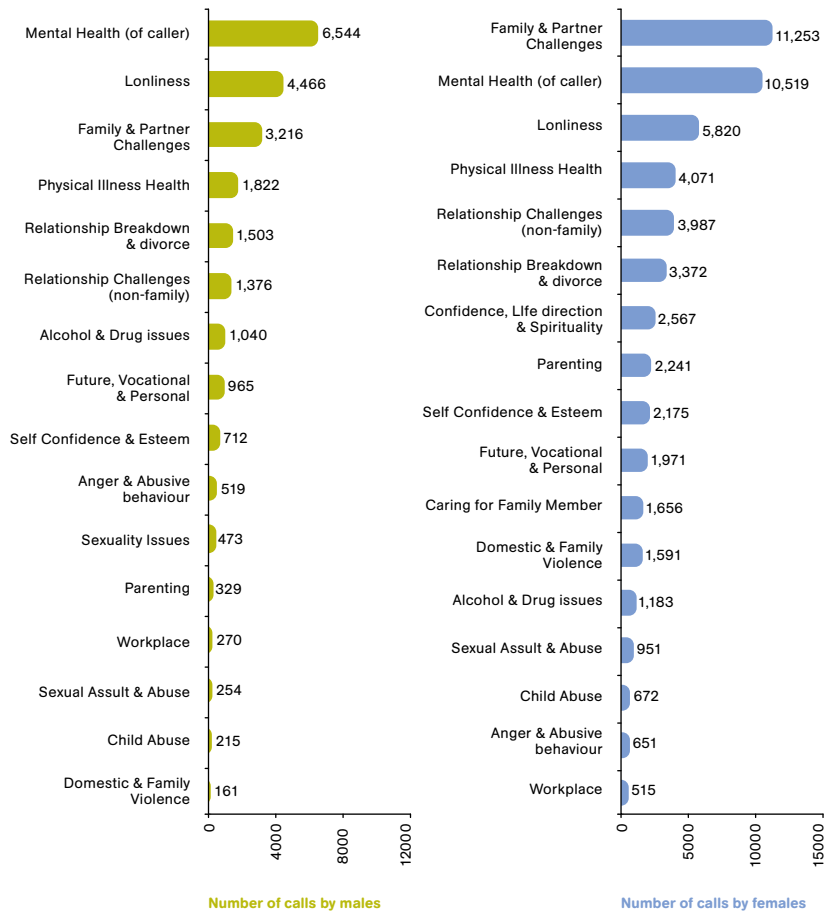
Those who disclose receiving treatment for a diagnosed mental health issue account for almost one quarter of calls made to Lifeline (25%). This does not include the number of calls from callers who may have an undiagnosed mental illness or who did not disclose this during the call.



Access to mental health services can be difficult for some, due to a number of restrictions such as not knowing where to find appropriate services, long waiting lists, distance required to travel, or cost barriers. It appears that some users of Lifeline 13 11 14 feel that it may be their only option in accessing mental health services.

The number of calls from men concerning their own mental health (28%) is higher than any other issue being discussed by men. The caller's own mental health is the second highest issue discussed by women (21%).

Gender: Detailed issues





4.3.1 WOMEN IN TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

Women are more likely to experience depression at a higher rate in Australia than men. 48% of calls from women indicate that they are receiving treatment for depression, and this number would be understated considering the number of callers who may have undiagnosed depression or did not disclose this during the call. This high number of calls from women receiving treatment, yet still calling Lifeline, may indicate that Lifeline's service allows callers to discuss how they are feeling about their situation on a more personal level. It also indicates that Lifeline's service may provide a vital bridging support mechanism for those recovering from mental health issues between scheduled appointments with their health professional.

4.3.2 THOSE WHO HAVE THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE AND A MENTAL ILLNESS

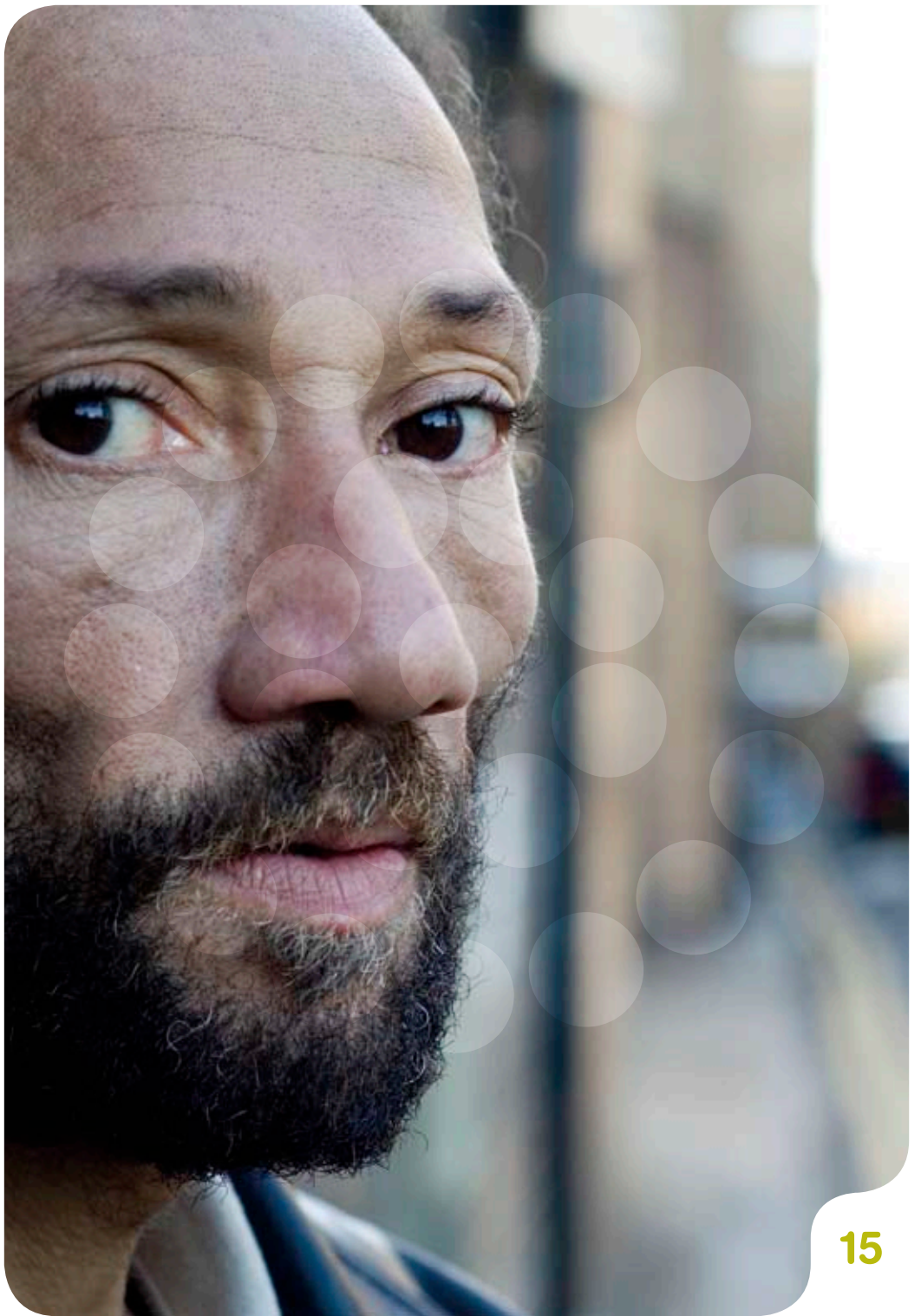
32% of suicide-related calls where suicidality was disclosed to Lifeline also report that their mental health is a main concern. This demonstrates that Lifeline is responding to individuals who have mental health concerns and suicidality. Lifeline is available 24/7, providing the support required to those who may not know where else to turn.

4.4 THOSE EXPERIENCING WORKPLACE STRESS

Workplace stress is a common concern for Australian employees and employers, with national statistics showing a steady increase in workplace stress in recent years⁴.

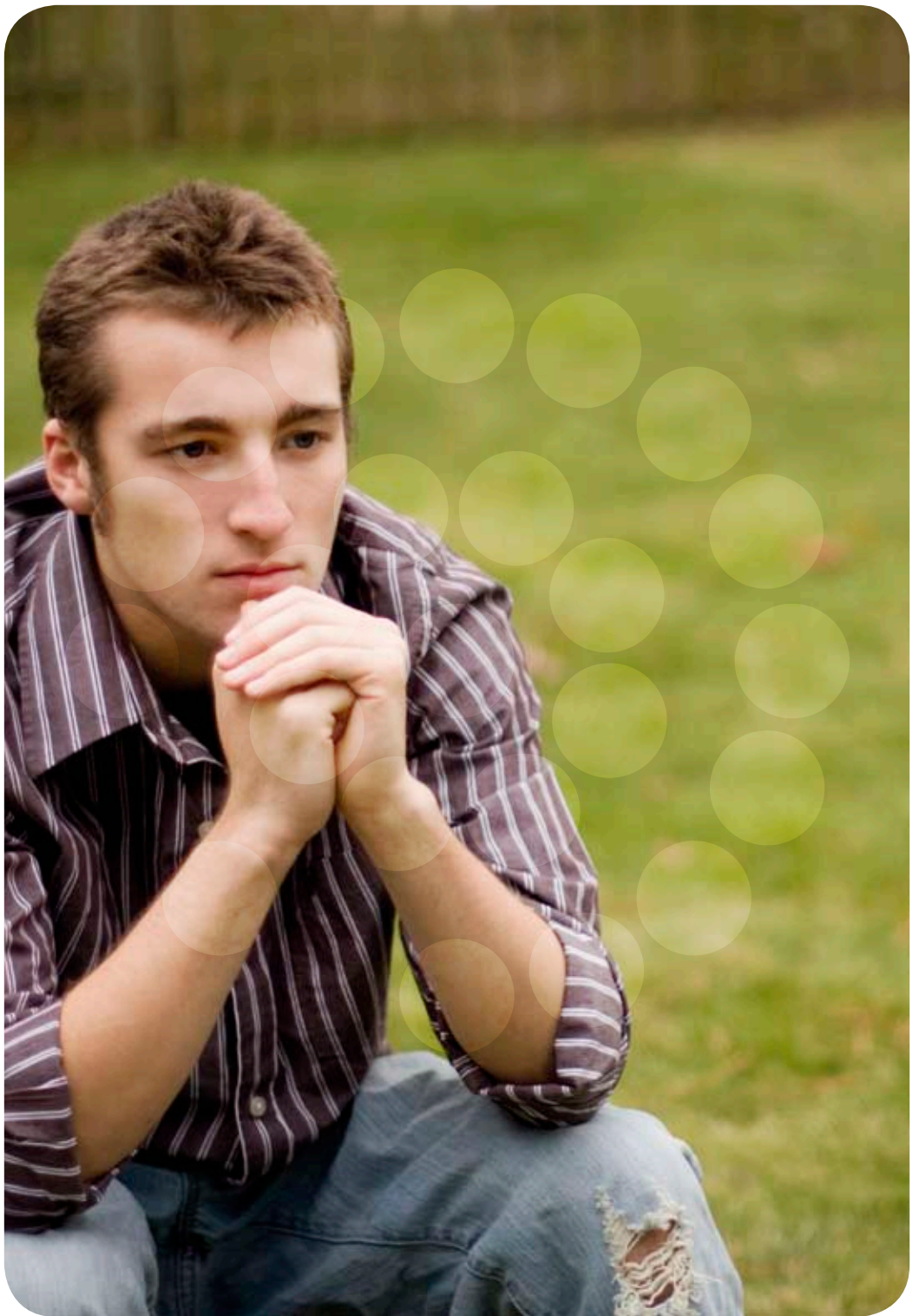
The emotional toll that workplace stress takes on the health and wellbeing of individuals is demonstrated in Lifeline's data and shows that Lifeline is often a support mechanism utilised by individuals facing the detrimental effects of workplace stress.

Of 845 calls received concerning workplace stress during the reference period, 14% also concerned the caller's mental health. Men are more likely than women to discuss 'work' during the course of a suicide-related call, and calls concerning 'Relationship or Divorce' are also found to be the highest from those who were currently employed (59%).



5. Closing

This information demonstrates that Lifeline plays a vital role in addressing a number of the social policy issues facing many Australians; particularly those most vulnerable to suicide, mental illness, and abuse. Data clearly indicates that Lifeline is being utilised by those who are vulnerable and require the support and resources on offer to improve their circumstances and wellbeing. It becomes clear at times that Lifeline may be the only support mechanism that these individuals choose to help address their needs.



To talk to a Lifeline
telephone volunteer
24/7, please call
13 11 14

For further information, self-help
tool kits and resources, please
visit the Lifeline website
www.lifeline.org.au

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