

# Distressed city youth bank on helpline for info

Anahita Mukherji | TNN

**Mumbai:** From loneliness to sexuality, to job stress to information on the nearest AIDS testing centre, Mumbai's youths often find themselves starved of information as they grapple with their own private turmoil, and nobody to share it with. In a bid to provide them with an outlet, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA)—an organisation that has for long worked on gender equality and sexuality—has set up the Yuva Maitri helpline (022-26826062) for youth, which operates between 10 am and 6 pm every day.

Over two months into the helpline, they have now quantified data on the kind of calls they have received from both men and women.

"A majority of callers (65%), want information on a variety of matters, including legal help, access to gynaecologists, career counsellors and sexologists. Many callers want to know where they could get themselves tested for HIV," said Harish Sadani, one of the founders of MAVA, who has worked closely with the youth in several parts of the state, including Pune, Satara, Kolhapur and Mumbai. "I have found that youth in both urban and rural areas are desperately in need of a platform to express themselves," he said.

About 28% of callers dialled the helpline to discuss issues of sexuality. Two per cent of calls were to discuss apprehensions about marriage, emotional problems,



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job stress and doubts about pregnancy. Another 2% called because they were lonely. While 20% of callers were between the ages of 15 and 19, the majority (31%) are between the ages of 20 and 24.

Meet Tara Dnyaneshwar (20), who co-ordinates the helpline, recalls the time he received a call from a young homosexual who was plagued by feelings of guilt over his sexual orientation,

had multiple partners and was unable to maintain a steady relationship. "I explained to him that it was perfectly normal to be homosexual; it was just like a preference for tea over coffee. At the end of the conversation, he said he actually felt lighter for having shared his feelings with someone," said Meet.

Many callers have poured their hearts out over relationships gone sour. One caller spoke of how he hated his mother. He was forced into marriage and never spoke to either his wife or mother.

A teenage girl in Class XII called on the helpline and started weeping. She gradually came out with the story of how she had been betrayed by a friend, and her reputation

lay in tatters. She is one of the few girls who called on the helpline. "Only 5% of the calls we received were from women. This shows that women continue to remain repressed and are often afraid to share their woes, even on an anonymous helpline," said Sadani. Those who are not comfortable calling on a helpline can even send an email on [yuvamaitri@rocketmail.com](mailto:yuvamaitri@rocketmail.com).

Though the helpline is run from Mumbai, there have been a few outstation calls too, from places like Latur, Satara and Kolhapur. Currently, the helpline is manned by 10 volunteers, all of whom juggle their work or their studies with the youth helpline, which they man free of cost. MAVA is in need of more volunteers for the helpline.