



## Q3 2021 HELPLINE HEADLINES

Q3 2021 began our eighth continuous year of operations providing workers in the Bangladesh readymade garment sector with a trusted communication channel to report and help resolve workplace issues before they escalate into major concerns.

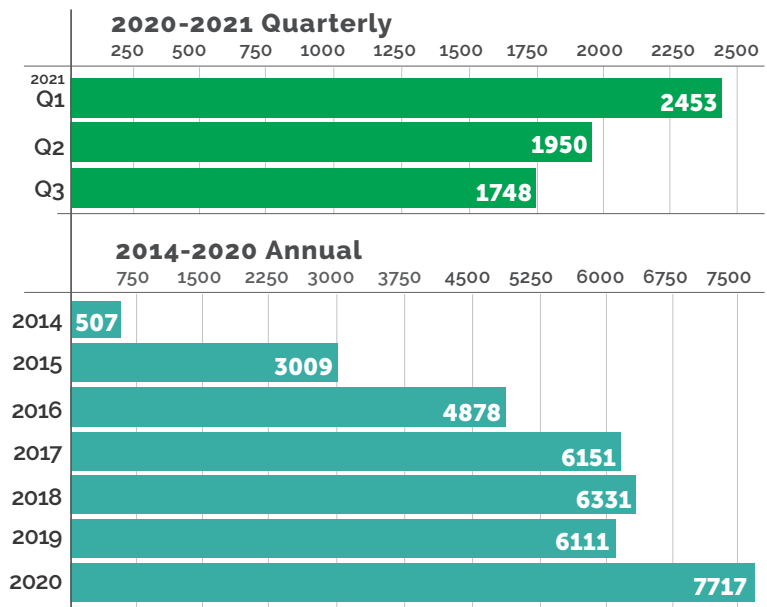
Since the Amader Kotha Helpline's inception in July 2014, the Helpline has been launched in more than 1,000 factories reaching more than 1.5 million workers. In the third quarter of this year, 8,247 calls were received of which 21% reported substantive issues. About 30% of issues were related to COVID-19 and the pandemic.

In this edition of *Our Voice*, our academic research partners describe the Helpline's latest effort to expand our impact through the *Safer Together* initiative, which offers workers an option to report sensitive issues as a group (see [page 5](#)). The Helpline has benefited from academic study of the Helpline's operations in the past; we look forward to continued learning as we improve our ability to serve our stakeholders by expanding the information we receive. Also, in this edition we are pleased to provide a close look at how one leading brand—Primark—uses the Helpline to support their ongoing work to identify and resolve the concerns of workers.

Workers continued to have access to trained Helpline officers via a toll-free number that is available nationwide from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays. After hours and weekend calls are returned the next business day.

As always, we look forward to hearing from you with comments and suggestions at: [info@amaderkothahelpline.net](mailto:info@amaderkothahelpline.net).

### SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES REPORTED TO HELPLINE



## Amader Kotha Helpline: A Case Study

**AMADER KOTHA:** What motivated Primark to engage with the Amader Kotha Helpline?

**PRIMARK:** We always want to hear from the workers in our suppliers' factories and want to ensure that all

workers have a number of trusted communications channels available to them. It is also a mandatory part of our Code of Conduct that we require all factories we use to have grievance mechanisms available for their workers. Additionally, when the pandemic started, we were

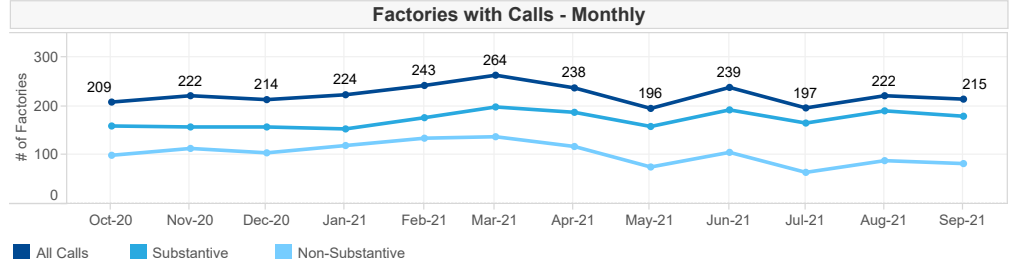
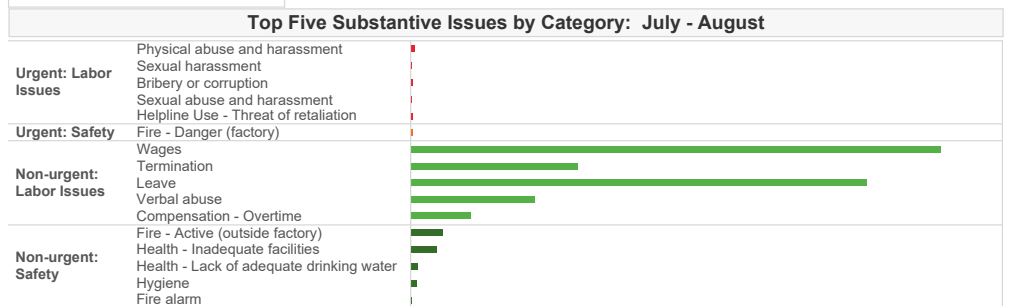
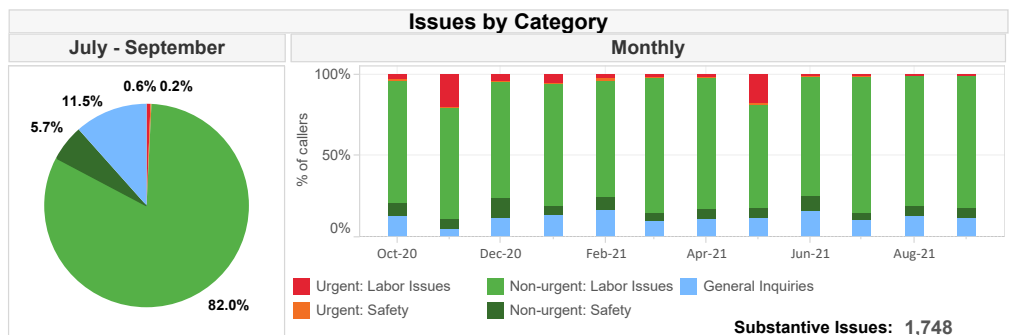
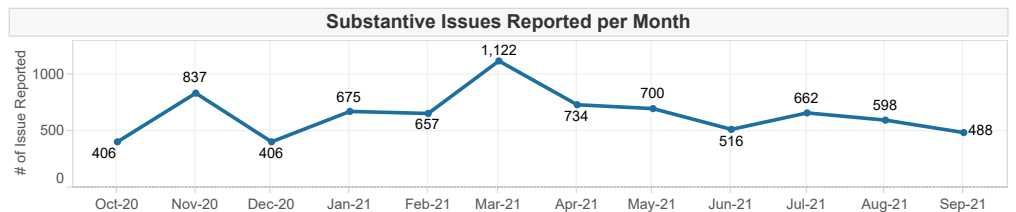
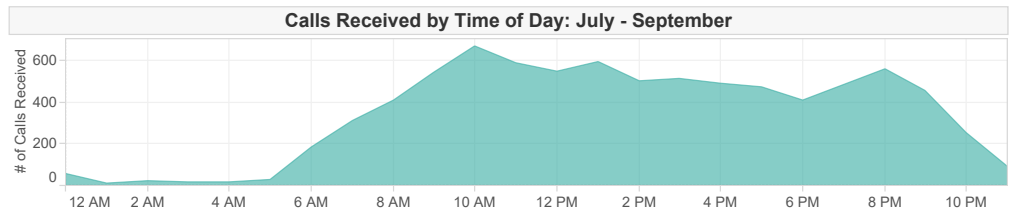
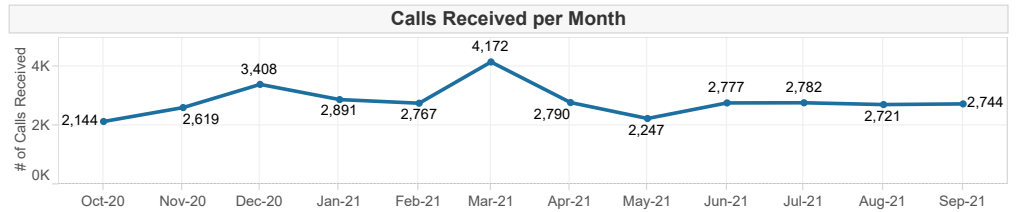
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# THIRD QUARTER 2021 FINDINGS

## KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- **8,247 calls were placed to Amader Kotha in the third quarter of 2021**, this is a 5% increase in calls compared to the previous quarter for a total of 34,062 calls received in the past 12 months.
- **21.2 % (1,748) of calls received were substantive issues.** A majority (82%) related to non-urgent labor issues such as compensation including wages and bonuses, termination and leave, and verbal abuse from supervisors. This quarter saw a substantial increase in calls regarding leave. In total, 3 urgent safety and 12 urgent labor issues were reported to the Helpline.
- **The most reported urgent issues were related to physical abuse and harassment**, as well as some calls relating to sexual harassment, bribery and threat of retaliation for Helpline use.
- **Urgent Safety** issues were reported at lower levels, compared to last quarter.





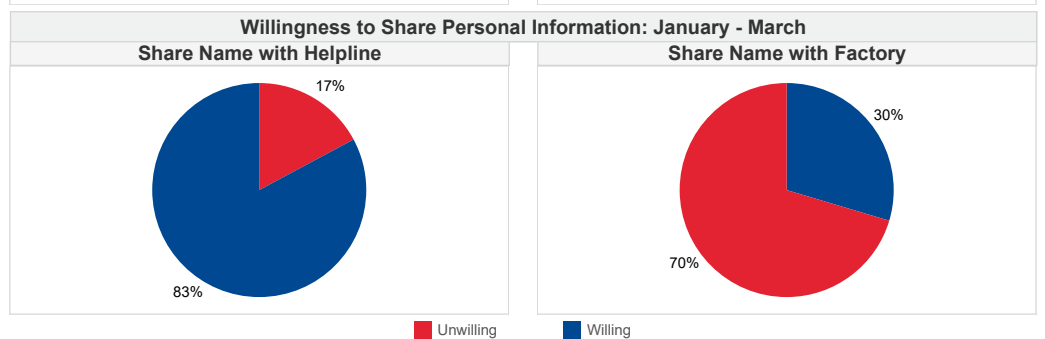
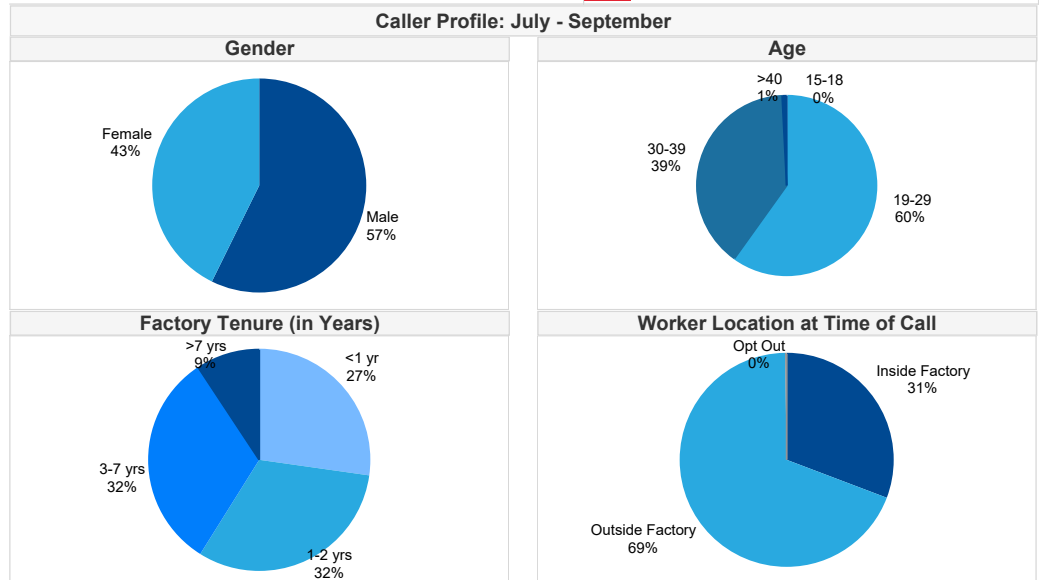
# THIRD QUARTER 2021 FINDINGS

## KEY FINDINGS, CONTINUED:

- **General inquiries comprised 13% of issues this period,** disregarding missed or test calls. Many of these were requests for information related to COVID-19 and government mandated lockdown, as well as factory internal policies around work arrangement and payments.
- **On average, the peak call times in Q3 2021 were between 10:00am and 8:00pm,** suggesting workers are more comfortable calling throughout the day. There is also a small increase in callers calling the Helpline earlier in the morning, from 7:00am onward.
- **83% of workers that called to report a substantive issue this period were comfortable sharing their name with the Helpline** and, of that group, 30% would allow their name to be shared with the factory, a small decrease from last quarter's 38%.
- **Of the 1,000+ factories that have received training on the Helpline, workers from 634 factories placed calls to the Helpline between July and September 2021.**

**NOTE:** Detailed call data is provided to brands after factories have had the opportunity to verify and respond to information provided by workers.

Issue Resolution: July - September		
Resolved	Helpline Response to Info Request	60%
	Per Factory	8%
	Per External Party(ies)/Referral	7%
Parties Unwilling to Resolve	Worker Does Not Seek Assistance	15%
	Non-cooperation by Member Company(ies)	0%
Unable to Pursue	Insufficient Documentation / Invalid Claim	0%
	Unable to Pursue: Non Listed Factory	10%



### Progress to Date (from July 2014 onward)

#### Total Calls

Inbound 49,782  
Outbound 576,804

#### Substantive Issues

42,844

#### Helpline Launched Factories

Factories: 1,196  
Workers: > 1.5 million

#### Notes:

- Graphs do not include calls from "General Inquiry", "False", or "No category" issue categories, except graphs on calls received and calls by time of day and where otherwise stated.
- Calls have been received from non-participating factories. These calls are included in the call volume and call time and factories with calls graphs above, but not included in the issue or caller profile visualizations.
- Substantive issues per month graph may not match historical newsletters due to changes in issue categorization over time.
- # of workers and # of factories where the Helpline has been launched are based on information on the Helpline's CRM database.

looking for more ways to stay connected with workers during lockdowns.

We were already aware of Amader Kotha and its well-established Helpline and reached out to them. Amader Kotha provides a solution where workers can raise grievances in confidence and also facilitates any general inquiries about Covid.

**AK: Are more workplace issues being identified now that factories are using the Helpline? Are they being adequately resolved?**

**P:** Supporting workers by facilitating ways in which their issues and grievances can be raised really matters to us. We investigate every issue or complaint we hear about, no matter what or where it comes from, so we are keen to encourage workers to use all the channels available so that we can help. This Helpline complements our other work as it gives workers another option and channel to use. We have been really pleased with its introduction, and it has already helped raise grievances, which so far have all been adequately resolved with the help of a local nonprofit partner, Phulki.

**AK: Is Primark receiving information about new kinds of issues not previously captured in audits?**

**P:** The Helpline is there to help answer all sorts of queries, and we see a wide variety of issues raised, which helps us understand the types of issues raised in the Bangladesh supply chain. It's a complementary channel that offers a straightforward way for workers to raise any issues. We look across all our channels which gives us a good understanding of the issues workers are concerned

about. This gives us valuable data that we can use to shape the type of questions we ask during the audits and inspections we carry out as part of our Code of Conduct. Our auditing system is rigorous and well equipped to find any issues. What's great about the Helpline is that it is always open so workers always have access.

**AK: Has the introduction of the Helpline created more work for the Primark team or reduced its level of effort in Bangladesh?**

**P:** We are committed to investing in initiatives that support the people who make our clothes and products in all of our sourcing markets. Having a team on the ground helps us connect to the local infrastructure and stay close to what is happening. Like any new project at the outset, we had to invest time and resources from our local team to set it up and introduce it to our suppliers' factories. What has been very encouraging is that since it is up and running, most issues raised have been resolved by factory management without needing direct support from Primark.

**AK: How does Primark know if the Helpline is consistent with a worker-centric approach and not just another top-down mandate?**

**P:** The Helpline is there to support workers. It aims to open up a direct and trusted channel for them that is easy to use and critically puts them at the center because cases are closed based on the worker's satisfaction with the resolution. More widely, we are also conducting a worker sentiment survey to better understand workers' needs and their access to grievance mechanisms in their factories. 🌐

Photo: Primark





## The 'Safer Together' Approach

### Offering Workers an Option to Report Labor Issues through the Amader Kotha Helpline as a Group

**Editors Note:** *The Amader Kotha Helpline has benefited from learning made possible by academic study of the Helpline protocols and outcomes. In this article, researchers describe the Helpline's latest effort to expand impact.*

Over the past several years, the Amader Kotha Helpline has learned a great deal about when and why workers in Bangladesh's readymade garment industry feel comfortable reporting issues at their factory to the Helpline. In particular, the Helpline has learned that workers feel more comfortable reporting issues when other workers also come forward. In contrast, workers feel less comfortable reporting issues when they are concerned that their reputations may suffer due to being a victim of certain behaviors or that they may face retaliation for making a report.

For example, between July 2020-July 2021, 24.2% of workers calling the Helpline to report harassment issues, which we identify as presenting higher reputational and retaliation risks, were unwilling to provide permission for the Helpline to raise their issue with factory management in order to resolve it. This compared to only 5.2% of workers calling to report other types of labor issues.

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***A reporting escrow allows individuals to report an issue with a trusted intermediary, who holds that information until a pre-determined number of reports of similar issues have been lodged. Once the threshold number of reports have been lodged, the intermediary acts on the information.***

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These deterrents to reporting suggest that workers may be more likely to make a report if they have the option to reporting using what is known as a reporting escrow. A reporting escrow allows individuals to report an issue with a trusted intermediary, who holds that information until a pre-determined number of reports

of similar issues have been lodged. Once the threshold number of reports have been lodged, the intermediary acts on the information. Information escrows are increasingly being adopted by organizations to facilitate reporting; for example, **Project**

**Callisto** helps universities set up these systems in the United States. The name of the Helpline's reporting escrow option, "Safer Together," acknowledges that some workers may only feel safe and comfortable raising their issues through the Helpline together with other workers. Figure 1 displays the "Safer Together" logo.

The Helpline informally uses a reporting escrow approach for certain types of issues; for example, for verbal harassment cases, it collects at least five reports of verbal harassment before raising this type of issue with management when requested to protect anonymity. Now, as part of its efforts to continuously improve its grievance resolution system, the Helpline has decided to test, on a trial basis, how formalizing its reporting escrow system for labor issues would impact workers' willingness to make reports and to allow the Helpline to raise their issues with factory management. Importantly, the reporting escrow will be an additional option available to workers; workers always have the option to make their report using the Helpline's standard system.

Our research team, comprised of the authors of this article, is supporting the Helpline to test "Safer Together" in a fair and credible way. In particular, we are supporting the Helpline evaluate the impact of the "Safer Together" model using a randomized controlled trial (RCT). As part of this trial, the "Safer Together" option will be rolled out to a randomly selected group of factories. Workers at



**Figure 1:** *The Safer Together logo*



*The 'Safer Together' Approach, continued*

those factories will have the option to report labor issues using "Safer Together" in addition to the option to make a standard report. If a worker opts to report using "Safer Together," but not enough other workers from forward for the Helpline to raise the issue within the next three months, the Helpline will check in with the worker to see whether the worker wants to keep their report using "Safer Together" or to change it to a standard report.

The Helpline will trial the "Safer Together" option for a period of 12-18 months. By comparing factories for which "Safer Together" is available, and factories for which it is not, the Helpline will be able to gauge the impact of escrows on reporting behavior. We will report on the study's findings in this Newsletter. 🗣️

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 **WHO ARE WE?**

Amader Kotha, or "Our Voice" in Bangla, is a unique collaboration among three project partners—Clear Voice, a project of The Cahn Group that operates hotlines and builds effective grievance mechanisms in supply chains; Phulki, a respected civil society organization working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh; and ELEVATE, the parent company of Laborlink, a leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider. Each partner brings years of experience building innovative, best-in-class labor compliance programs in supply chains. 🗣️

