

Responses to CCs' Data Questions

Introduction

We've seen and been listening to the feedback and questions brought forward by our Crisis Counselor community. In this document, we've compiled the most common questions that related to data, including:

1. What is the security and privacy of volunteer and texter data?
2. Does Crisis Text Line manipulate data? Are the statistics skewed?
3. Are things like Texter Feedback placed on our profiles real?
4. What is the data sharing relationship with Loris.ai?
5. How does Crisis Text Line use race data of volunteers and texters?

We expect you will have additional questions, and we would love to hear them. We are committed to transparency, and seeking your input and feedback on our data science processes moving forward.

1. What is the security and privacy of volunteer and texter data?

At Crisis Text Line, we believe the privacy and confidentiality of the people involved in our service are paramount. Honoring the trust that texters and volunteers place in us in that regard is one of our core values. Since 2013, we've completed four independent privacy audits, one security audit in 2018, additional security tests in 2019, and are currently undergoing an independent privacy and security audit, which will be completed in Q4 2020. We will share a summary of the findings when they are available. We're compliant with privacy standards including [HIPAA](#), [Canada Health Infoway](#), and [GDPR](#).

2. Does Crisis Text Line manipulate data? Are the statistics skewed?

No. We have not manipulated data, changed numbers, or altered data in any way. We put serious effort and rigor behind our analyses. Our data staff are highly trained, all analyses are documented and replicable, and we confirm internal analyses with periodic independent reviews.

Related question: Do you pick and choose more flattering measures?

We have standard definitions for many key metrics, such as our KPIs. However, we do not yet have standard definitions for all of the concepts we work with and measure, such as “quality.” Because we haven’t always had clear, singular definitions for all of the concepts we use, there have been times where concepts have been inconsistently measured and/or reported. When we don't have a consistent definition of our concepts, it can create confusion internally, and an inconsistent story externally. This is something we are working to standardize as much as possible.

Looking ahead:

Moving forward, we will work to define any concepts we report on and commit to as much consistency as possible across the organization as we define more concepts. We are committed to improving our data practices to conform to best practices at every level.

3. Are things like Texter Feedback placed on our profiles real?

Yes. Texter feedback is real. Texters submit feedback as a part of the texter survey, which is offered at the end of each conversation via an automated message sent after CCs end the conversation. Historically, about 10% of texter conversations leave feedback. If your texter left you feedback, it takes us some time (a few days on average) to add it to your profile. This is because we take the following steps: (1) we remove volunteer and texter Personally Identifiable Information, which is replaced with the word “[scrubbed]”, and (2) all feedback is reviewed by Coaches to eliminate inappropriate content, which occurs in a very small proportion of feedback.

4. What is the data sharing relationship with Loris.ai (Loris)? What level of data access do they have? Does Loris share Crisis Text Line data with other businesses? Does Nancy Lublin run Loris, or, how is she involved in its operations?

Crisis Text Line's relationship with Loris is governed by contracts negotiated by outside legal counsel on each side. Loris only has access to anonymized, aggregated conversation data that have been scrubbed of Personally Identifiable Information. Loris looks for strategies that our volunteers have employed with texters for de-escalation that can be used similarly with customer service agents. Loris does not share Crisis Text Line data with other businesses.

Nancy Lublin founded Loris, but is no longer on the Board or involved in the operation of the company.

5. How does Crisis Text Line use race data of volunteers and texters?

We ask both texters and volunteers survey questions about race among other demographics, including age, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, and military status. We use demographic data, including race, in two important ways:

1. To look for inequalities in our volunteer and texter experiences (e.g. differences in texter outcomes, volunteer satisfaction) by demographic, so that we can address them.
2. To support research exploring how some communities experience crisis in unique ways, with the goal of informing diverse, equitable care. For example, a recent research partnership with Lawrence Berkeley Labs and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs looked at language that indicates suicidal risk specifically for veterans.

One of the most important reasons to analyze demographic information is to ensure that we do not design “one-size-fits-all” solutions. To date, demographics, including race, are one of the most important ways we can segment our data to ensure that we can see how experiences differ by demographic and guide informed solutions.

Related comment from CCs: “There is picture evidence that Crisis Text Line collected data based on race, specifically analyzing volunteer productivity between races and ethnicities. Questionable data collection processes are apparent and are shown to be racially biased.”

The photo referenced was excerpted from a draft analysis conducted in 2016, where we explored if our training and Platform experiences may have been unintentionally creating inequitable experiences for some groups of volunteers. At the time, we chose to look for inequities by measuring retention across the training and Platform experiences, with shorter retention being a potential indicator of disproportionate volunteer experiences. The full final document included analyses of how retention varied for multiple demographics, including occupation, education, age, prior experience in crisis care, military status, gender, race, and referral source (e.g., where did you hear about Crisis Text Line?). The language used caused pain, and we’re sorry for this. (“Best CCs” and “productivity” are no longer in use.)

Looking ahead:

We are greatly expanding our focus on health equity, by bringing this lens to all of our data work. We have committed to working with leading experts to provide critical feedback on how we can most responsibly analyze our data to surface and address inequities.

Closing

We're committed to continually evolving and improving our data work. We regularly work with auditors and researchers where appropriate. In order to best restore your trust in us, we are currently looking at third parties to have a neutral party provide the review on what we do well and what could improve. More on this soon. In the meantime, we will continue to be reflective and committed to ongoing improvement and evolution, and will publish regular updates along the way.

We're also looking forward to continued engagement with your ongoing feedback and ideas. We will be creating spaces for continued dialogue on best practices for data work and are eager to hear from our supporters and peers in the space. If you have any questions or ideas about the content in this document now, please email us at info@crisistextline.org.

Thank you for your support and thank you to all contributors.