

A Feasibility Study for Measuring the Long-term Support Needs of Adult Sexual Assault Survivors

Project report

Principal investigator: Prof. David Gadd, University of Manchester

Project background

This project was funded by the UKRI Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network as part of its workstream on the theme of measurement of violence, abuse and mental health.

The project ran for a total of 2 years and 5 months



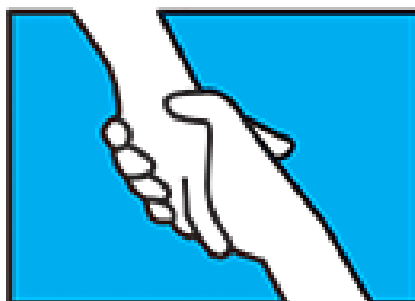
Project team:

- Prof David Gadd, University of Manchester
- Dr Rabiya Majeed-Ariss, Saint Mary's SARC
- Dr Maria Pampaka, University of Manchester
- Oana Petcu, University of Glasgow
- Dr Filippo Varese, University of Manchester
- Dr Laura Watt, University of Manchester

Project partners:

Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre

St Mary's Centre



Sexual Assault Referral Centre

Project summary

Background

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) offer support for survivors of sexual abuse, including medical, psychological, and legal assistance. While SARCs are effective in the short-term, survivors are often offered less support in the longer-term. A questionnaire, measuring the long-term needs of survivors, was created to help inform services how best to meet them. The questionnaire is accessed online and designed to be completed at three, six and twelve months following an assault so changing needs can be tracked. It asks respondents what effects they suffer from the assault, the support they sought and how effective it was, as well as what other support would be helpful to them. It also measures respondents' mental health. In 2020/2021, the questionnaire was piloted on a sample of Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre clients. The pilot was designed to assess the feasibility of the survey, and the procedure of recruiting participants. Participant recruitment proved difficult. Only 18 people completed a survey three months after attending Saint Mary's, of which only nine completed a follow-up survey a further three months later. Tests of validity showed the questionnaire to be a promising measure of the long-term needs of sexual assault survivors, but it is impossible to be conclusive about this with such a small sample. Ideally this would include a researcher embedded in Saint Mary's SARC who could administer the survey in person. Responses to the questionnaire suggest that sexual assault survivors have a sustained need for long term emotional and psychological support. Most respondents suffered from moderate/severe anxiety and/or depression as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, months after the assault. Survivors also need ongoing support in the legal process, and help stopping further abuse. Half of the respondents had been sexually assaulted more than once.

Conclusions

Methodologically, the study reveals that it is feasible to use online methods linked to existing datasets (e.g., client records) to reduce the pressures of recall on survivors. It also shows a willingness of many survivors of sexual abuse to participate in research, with 27% agreeing to be contacted by a researcher. However, the study also reveals that there are significant obstacles in recruiting participants when the research team is far removed from the site of support, in this case Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre. Having no direct contact with potential participants makes the recruitment process slower and more cumbersome. Having a researcher embedded in the service who could fully explain the importance of the research and administer the survey in person would be helpful. It would also limit the issue of some participants being excluded because of literacy limitations (e.g., due to English being a second language or learning disabilities) or a lack of internet access.

Key messages

Top 3 key messages from the project



There is a willingness among some survivors to report on their long-term needs using online methods and an acceptance of the value of linking medical records with survey disclosures to reduce the trauma of having to recount the details of sexual assaults.

There are difficulties to overcome in recruiting samples from recently victimised and traumatised service users that can probably only be redressed by embedding researchers within clinical settings.



Sexual assault survivors need medium and long term emotional and psychological support to address the mental health needs that follow an assault and the demands legal processes place on them.

Outputs

Blog: No quick fix: the long-term needs of sexual assault survivors

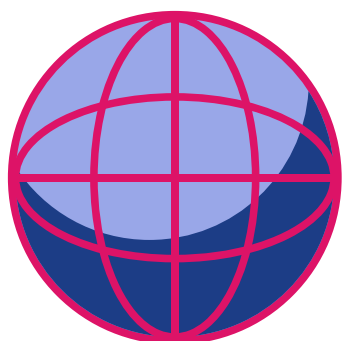
- Published on the Policy@Manchester Blogs webpage on 9th February 2022.
- This blog explain the findings of the project and makes recommendations for policy makers. Written by Laura Watt, David Gadd, Maria Pampaka, Filippo Varese and Rabiya Majeed-Ariss
- To read the blog click [here](#).

Blog: Gender and sexual violence

- Published on the Policy@Manchester Blogs webpage on 2nd March 2020.
- This blog explores how gender intersects with social demographic characteristics to compound vulnerabilities and complicate access to services. Written by Dr Catherine White, Dr Rabiya Majeed-Ariss and Professor David Gadd
- To read the blog click [here](#).

Project website

- The project website contains videos explaining the projects methodology. Additionally, the two online questionnaires produced from this project are available to view on the website. Organisations seeking to measure the long term needs of sexual assault survivors are welcome to adapt them for their own purposes.
- To access the project website, click [here](#).



More outputs will be shared as part of this project including academic papers. We will be sure to signpost these when they become available.

The Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network

We will be sure to keep our members updated on any outputs linked to this project in the future. To keep updated you can sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter. You can also follow us on our socials . All links can be found at the bottom of this page.

About the VAMHN

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

Measurement	Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement
Understanding	Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems
Intervention	Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems

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