

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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First Year Findings of the Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres for Better Health (MESARCH) Project

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Sexual Assault Referral Centers (SARCs) were introduced in the UK as a model of responding to sexual violence. Investment in SARCs has grown considerably in the last 20 years. However, there is variation in models of SARC provision and a lack of evidence on their effectiveness in addressing the immediate and long-term consequences of sexual violence. The MESARCH (Multi-disciplinary Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres for better Health) project, funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), will undertake a nationally-representative, mixed-methods assessment of SARCs to identify effective models of care and interventions for survivors of sexual assault, rape and child sexual abuse. This presentation will outline the findings of (1) a systematic literature investigating the effectiveness of interventions designed to support adult survivors of sexual violence and (2) the longitudinal pilot study examining the outcomes and impacts at one SARC. All service users presenting at the SARC for care over a two-month period were assessed for eligibility by trained SARC staff. In telephone interviews at baseline and two months, we measured PTSD, sexual health, depressive symptoms, quality of life, substance misuse, health service use, adverse childhood experiences and screened for domestic violence. Participants were also interviewed about their experience of the pilot. Our presentation critically evaluates these methods, sharing how lessons from the pilot shaped our subsequent 'main' study and, crucially, how they could inform other research in this sensitive and methodologically challenging area. The practical implications for good practice for SARCs and methodological contributions to researching in this area will be discussed.

Sarah Brown is the Chair-Elect of NOTA and has been conducting research related to sexual aggression for over 20 years. She is a Forensic Psychologist, Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Fellow of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA). She is an Advisory Board Member of the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse an Associate Editor of Child Abuse and Neglect and a member of the Editorial Board of Sexual Abuse and the Journal of Sexual Aggression having been the Editor of the latter journal from 2008 to 2014. Sarah is leading one of the workstreams on the Multi-disciplinary Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres for better Health (MESARCH) project.