

Clients who self-refer to St Mary's SARC: How does this population differ from police-referred clients?

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Background

The majority of patients who come into contact with St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) are referred by the police. Some patients self-refer for services, and non-legal practitioners gather information relevant to the alleged assault.

Information is primarily gathered directly from the patient in the form of an initial, brief account of the alleged incident including finding out what happened and when. The purpose of collecting information, at this stage, is to establish which services may be required.

At St Mary's SARC, a proportion of self-referred cases convert to criminal investigations. In such instances, information gathered by practitioners' may be used as evidence during criminal investigations and inform legal decision-making.

Methods

Self-referred clients' case notes from a 12 month period were selected for review and matched to a sample of police-referred clients from a comparable time period. Inclusion criteria were that clients were (i) aged over 18 years of age and (ii) had attended the Centre for a forensic medical examination (FME).

When clients attend the St Mary SARC for a FME, they are routinely asked by the forensic physician about demographic information and details concerning the time, and nature, of the alleged assault. These data are then recorded by the forensic physician in the contemporaneous medical notes as collected on Saint Mary's SARC pro forma. Data from the client's case notes were coded into categories, and crosstabs descriptive analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software.

Conclusions and future work

Compared to police-referred clients, clients who self-refer to St Mary's:

- Are typically in full-time employment or full-time education;
- Have no reported disability;
- Are unsure about the nature of the assault that they had experienced;
- Are unsure about the alleged perpetrator.

These data suggest that the relationship with the perpetrator, combined with a lack of clarity about the offence experienced, could be a predictor of whether clients self-refer to St Mary's or whether they report their experience to the police first. Future research should explore clients' rationale for self-referral, as well as their views about reporting (or not reporting) alleged offences to the police.

Future work should also explore the proportion and characteristics of self-referred cases that convert to criminal investigations. At present, very little is known about the ways that non-legal practitioners gather initial accounts from clients, and to what extent information-gathering techniques differ from that of legal professionals.

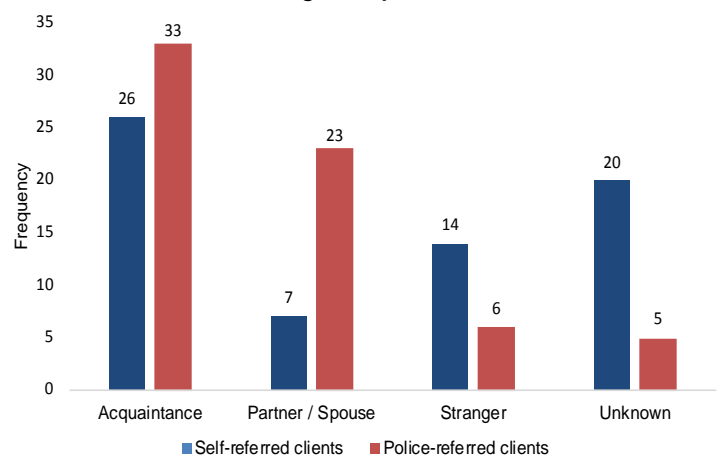
Results

Demographic characteristics

Age: Regardless of referral mode, the mean age of all clients in the sample was 29. Clients who self-referred to St Mary's were aged from 18 to 71, and police-referred clients aged from 18 to 54.

Demographic characteristic		Self-referred clients		Police-referred clients	
		N=67	% of total	N=67	% of total
Gender	Female	58	43.30%	64	47.80%
	Male	8	6.00%	3	2.20%
	Undisclosed	1	0.70%	0	0.00%
Ethnicity	White British	55	41.00%	53	36.60%
	Other	11	8.20%	14	10.40%
	Undisclosed	1	0.70%	0	0.00%
Employment status	Full-time employment	31	23.10%	11	8.20%
	Part-time employment	4	3.00%	6	4.50%
	Unemployed / retired	15	11.20%	23	17.20%
	Full-time education	17	12.70%	8	6.00%
	Unable to work	0	0.00%	15	11.20%
	Undisclosed	0	0.00%	4	3.00%
Marital status	Single	49	36.70%	47	35.10%
	Married / civil partnership / long-term relationship	9	6.70%	13	9.70%
	Separated / Divorced	4	2.90%	5	3.70%
	Unknown	5	3.70%	2	1.50%
Disability	Disabled	67	50.00%	51	38.10%
	Non-disabled	0	0.00%	16	11.90%

Alleged Perpetrator



Alleged Offence

Type of offence	Self-referred clients		Police-referred clients	
	N=67	% of total sample	N=67	% of total sample
Rape	32	23.90%	56	41.70%
Sexual assault	12	9.00%	5	3.70%
Not known	23	17.20%	6	4.50%