

CREATING AND DELIVERING TRAUMA INFORMED TRAINING FOR FORENSIC EXAMINERS WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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“ The thing about being raped is that you had your choice taken away from you, stolen, and then you’re sort of pushed into this strange situation where all these people are looking at you as a piece of evidence and making decisions for you. So again you feel completely powerless. ”

BACKGROUND

FORENSIC EXAMINATION

Victims of rape and sexual assault who report to the police undergo a detailed forensic examination within seven days of assault. This involves:

- Not washing prior to examination.
- Full body and internal ano-genital examination with forensic sampling (swabs)
- Documentation of injuries which may include photography.
- Examiners wearing protective clothing, mask and gloves.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT of RAPE and SEXUAL ASSAULT

- **Intrusive memories:** In the aftermath of sexual assault or rape, most people are extremely vulnerable to intrusive memories.
- **Re-traumatisation:** happens when intrusive memories are triggered by any physical or relational similarities to the rape or sexual assault, leaving victims feeling ‘like it is happening again’
- **Triggers:** In the forensic examination, triggers for re-traumatisation can include:
 - **physical:** (body position, penetration of orifices)
 - **interpersonal / relational:** (feelings of loss of control, powerlessness, coercion, confusion, loss of safety and breaches of trust).
- A Trauma Informed Examiner:
 - minimises re-traumatisation for the victim
 - offers a relationship that maximises their recovery in the long term.



A PERFECT STORM

Heightened risk of re-traumatisation in the aftermath of rape or sexual assault



Presence of physical and relational triggers throughout the forensic examination



Perfect storm for re-traumatisation, need for trauma informed examiners.

The new National Taskforce and HIS standards stress the need for training to ensure that victims of sexual violence experience consistent, person-centred, trauma-informed healthcare.²

AIMS

To create a blended learning training programme for examiners, embedding the principles of Trauma Informed Practice throughout so that they can:

- Minimise physical and relational triggers for re-traumatisation for victims throughout the examination.
- Provide an examination where the examinee feels in control of the process and empowered by it, can trust their examiner, and is offered choice and collaboration throughout.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

- Well received, with very positive feedback.
- Co-production between medical and psychology colleagues was important and effective
- Impact went beyond FME audience: A broad appetite from - nursing, police, judiciary - indicates a need for multi-agency training to encourage a service wide, trauma informed approach
- Ongoing need for service user feedback to evaluate the impact of training on practice and user experience.
- Analysis of comparative data and service user feedback is needed to assess the impact of training on practice and user experience.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

Collaborative working between NES psychologists and forensic examiners produced the following educational training resources



E-module | Walk-through video | Face-to-face workshops | Multi-agency training (Shetland)
Filmed conversation of forensic examiner and psychologist | Animation ‘Opening Doors’



“ forensic healthcare services are not victim-centred ”

“ no chaperones present ”

“ often no choice of gender of examiner ”

“ some specific concerns about the manner and empathy displayed by forensic physicians ”

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary Scotland (HMICS) Report 2017¹

“ I can’t stress how much the ability to simply make a decision for yourself helps. I think it’s so important to give women as much autonomy throughout the process as possible. ”

REFERENCES

¹ HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland. Strategic Overview of Provision of Forensic Medical Services to Victims of Sexual Crime March 2017

² Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Healthcare and Forensic Medical Services for people who have experienced rape, sexual assault or child sexual abuse. Standards. Dec 2017

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