

Evaluation of a workshop for significant others of complainants of sexual assault

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Background

It has long been established that social support plays a key role in mediating the sequelae of rape and sexual assault. Negative social reactions such as victim blaming are frequently reported by complainants of sexual assault and are often associated with worse psychological adjustment post assault (Davis et al., 1991; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Unfortunately, despite many campaigns to raise awareness of rape myths and stereotypes, we continue to live in a culture where the blame for the sexual assault is placed on the complainants and many act as if sexual assault is normal. Significant others often wish to support the person who has been sexually assaulted but may not know how, and may at times unwillingly increase complainants' distress. Although negative social responses have been found to be clearly associated to negative mental health outcomes, links between positive social reactions and psychological symptoms are mixed and research in this field is scarce to date (DePrince et al., 2014).

The development of a workshop for significant others of complainants of sexual assault attending The Havens (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) arose from clinical observations of the impact of significant others' behaviours on clients' psychological symptoms post assault. The Havens psychologists developed a 2 hour psychoeducation and coping skills workshop for significant others who are supporting someone who has experienced sexual assault.

Aims

The primary aim of the project is to evaluate the impact of the workshop for significant others on levels of perceived social support reported by complainants of sexual assault. A secondary aim is to determine the impact of the workshop on significant others' knowledge about sexual assault, confidence in supporting complainants of sexual assault and their own self-care.

Methods

The workshop is open to all significant others of Havens clients and registration is required by contacting a member of the Havens psychology service. All Havens psychology and counselling clients are also given information about the workshop and encouraged to discuss it with significant others whenever appropriate. The workshop is a one-off intervention for 2 hours with a 20 minute break. The workshop will address common reactions following sexual assault, rape myths and stereotypes, how to support someone who has experienced sexual assault and self-care for the significant others.

We will measure the impact of the delivery of the workshop on clients' perceptions of support using the Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ; Ullman, 2000) at a baseline interview prior to the significant other attending the workshop and at 3 month follow-up. In addition, we will

evaluate the workshop in terms of the content, relevance; coping strategies learnt and how equipped the significant others feel to implement the knowledge acquired. We will also examine the impact of the workshop on significant others' attitudes to sexual assault using a questionnaire on attitudes toward rape before and after the workshop.

Results

The workshop will be piloted in June 2016 and we hope to collect and analyse data and to present preliminary findings at the conference.