

Wait, but why? Evaluation of the impact of a psychoeducation and coping skills workshop on mood, distress and trauma-related symptoms following acute sexual assault

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Background

Recent research suggests that brief early psychological interventions offered to complainants of sexual assault can mitigate traumatic impact and mobilize complainants' capacity to adapt and to avoid the onset of chronic troubles (Tarquinio et al., 2012). The Havens is a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) based in London who sees any complainant within 1 year post-assault. Most clients are referred to the Havens Psychology and Counselling team by the Havens multidisciplinary team approximately 3 to 4 weeks post-assault. The therapies team noticed that clients on the waiting list for therapy present with acute traumatic indicators and distress, and identified a service need to better support clients while they wait for therapy. A new set of workshops was subsequently introduced in September 2015, as a brief early intervention to offer psycho-education and enhance coping skills until clients begin individual or group therapy. These one-off workshops comprise a 2 hour session of psychoeducation about common psychological reactions to sexual assault, and coping skills to deal with these difficulties.

Aims

The primary aim of the project is to evaluate the impact of a psychoeducation and coping skills workshop on symptoms experienced following sexual assault. A secondary aim is to analyse qualitative feedback about workshops to assess their impact on understanding of psychological reactions to sexual assault, use of coping strategies to deal with these difficulties, and level of self-blame.

Methods

The project will investigate whether the workshop has an impact on symptoms commonly experienced following sexual assault. These outcomes will be measured using standardised self-report measures at baseline assessment and 4-week follow up, prior to clients starting individual therapy sessions. A qualitative questionnaire will also be used to measure clients' understanding of psychological reactions to sexual assault, use of coping strategies to deal with these difficulties, and level of self-blame.

Results- Preliminary qualitative feedback from pilot workshops

The workshops were piloted from September 2015 – March 2016. During this period, four workshops were run every 6 weeks and qualitative feedback was collected from 30 workshop

participants using a client satisfaction survey. Feedback indicated that clients found the workshop a valuable experience in helping them manage their difficulties and better understand the psychological sequelae of rape and sexual assault. Client feedback was overwhelmingly positive and components of the workshop that clients found most helpful/unhelpful will be discussed.

Future results

During the pilot phase, the workshop protocol was adapted in line with client feedback and clinicians' experience of running the workshops. The finalised protocol will be used for workshops running from April 2016. We hope to collect and analyse quantitative outcome data from a series of workshops running from April onwards, and to present preliminary findings at the conference.