

# DR LORNA O'DOHERTY

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ABUSE, TRAUMA AND  
HEALTH RESEARCH, COVENTRY UNIVERSITY



**Trauma burden among survivors of sexual violence and abuse accessing SARCs, and outcomes one year later: findings from the Multidisciplinary Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres for better Health (MESARCH) cohort study**



The MESARCH project was commissioned to evaluate SARCs, which are accessed by around 55,000 survivors of sexual offences in England each year. Evidence within the project derived from 6 major sub-studies, and drew on the experiences and data of 6,901 survivors. This presentation explores our cohort study which featured three waves of data collection over one-year (21 SARCs, 2,602 service users screened, 337 people recruited). It used a multilevel-modelling framework to explore risk factors for PTSD burden at baseline and change at one-year. A clear picture emerged of a risk 'triad' with adverse childhood experiences, chronic mental health problems and economic deprivation affecting people's PTSD presentations to a greater degree than aspects of the offence (e.g. relation to perpetrator; time since trauma) though these were still important. Whilst there were clinically important improvements in trauma symptoms, difficulties persisted for half of participants one year later. The work calls for attention to the wider context of people's lives and timely access to a range of therapies and advocacy through multi-agency/sector partnerships together with a life-course, intersectional approach to supporting healing and recovery. MESARCH provides a basis for advancing trauma-informed research and enhancing practices across settings where survivors present for care and support.

Dr Lorna O'Doherty is an Associate Professor of abuse, trauma and health research at Coventry University, leading a programme of research within the Institute for Health and Wellbeing. Lorna is a mixed methods researcher, with an international reputation in the field of domestic and sexual violence having published an RCT of a primary care domestic violence intervention in *The Lancet* and four Cochrane Reviews in the field. She was principal investigator on the MESARCH project (NIHR 2018-23) investigating survivors' journeys after accessing SARCs and on the JiCSAV (Justice in Covid for Sexual Abuse and Violence) project (ESRC 2020-22). She is currently leading the evaluation of *Upfront Survivors*, a new project which strives to build a visible, peer-led accessible survivor community in partnership with frontline services and a survivor-led theatre company (Home Office 2023-25).

**ZOOM  
WEBINAR**

**WEDNESDAY  
12 JULY  
4.00 - 5.00PM**

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