

More assistance needed for male survivors of sexual assault

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Researchers from Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington have helped shed light on the difficulties men face to seeking help for abuse.

"Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse (SVA): Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services" was published this week by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), prepared by researchers from Te Herenga Waka, the University of Otago, and the Donald Beasley Institute.

Professor Louise Dixon, Dean of Te Wāhanga Pūtaiao—the Wellington Faculty of Science at Victoria University of Wellington, says survivors can take many years to report sexual violence.

"Among the 52 male survivors we interviewed for this study, the average time taken to report sexual violence and abuse was 18 years. The length of time varied widely, with the majority reporting anywhere between 10 and 50 years."

Some men never reported what happened to them and only four reported the first incident of abuse within 48 hours of it occurring.

"Most survivors, but not all, later sought out specialist help. The most common reason for doing so was to address problems that had arisen from them in their lives as a result of the sexual violence and abuse," she says.

The study identified five key barriers that influenced whether the male survivors sought help:

- gendered social norms and myths, including stereotypes that sexual violence and abuse doesn't happen to men,
- the availability and quality of the social support networks,
- the complex nature of trauma, which delayed survivors seeking help,
- a lack of appropriate and affordable services,
- and the quality of support from [service workers](#).

"Sexual violence and abuse is not commonly understood as something that happens to men and there are few specialist services that exist for men. This is despite a significant number of survivors identifying as men. Our study aimed to address this gap and inform the much-needed design of services for these men," Professor Dixon says.

Participants in the study described their ideal service as one that uses a trauma-informed approach, is culturally responsive, provides [peer support](#) and ensures privacy, trust, collaborative decision making, choice, and relaxation.

The study identified that where elements of this are included in services currently provided by MSD it creates the strongest foundation possible for healing. Services have also been offered to family or friends, to help them provide the best possible support they can to their friend or family member.

The [research](#) recommends improving services further, including training for specialist and non-specialist service workers, and education campaigns to encourage reporting of abuse. It identifies societal-wide education initiatives as key, so that people understand that sexual [violence](#) and abuse (SVA) can happen to anyone.

Professor Dixon says there is a clear need to challenge the myths and [social norms](#) about masculinity and what [sexual violence](#) is.

"Male survivors need affordable, accessible and bespoke services that meet their diverse needs, and we need to respond with empathy and compassion when victims and survivors come forward.

"We need to be good listeners and treat the disclosure of [abuse](#) with the utmost respect. Someone who is choosing to speak out should be cared for and supported as they work toward seeking help."

The findings reflect evidence heard in the current Royal Commission into Abuse in State Care and reinforce calls from those giving evidence for targeted and tailored services.

The research contributes to the ongoing development of male [survivor](#) services to make sure they are responsive to the needs of a diverse range of male survivors.

More information: Male survivors of sexual violence and abuse: Barriers and facilitators to reporting and accessing services.
www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-...-essing-services.html

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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