

ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION: INFORMING SERVICE RESPONSES TO CO-OCCURRING SEXUAL VICTIMISATION TRAUMA AND ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE

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Introduction/Issues: The sexual assault (SXA) and alcohol and other drug (AOD) sectors have much in common in the context of clients presenting with histories of abuse and trauma, particularly sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.

Method/Approach: This project aimed to improve understanding of the complex intersections between AOD use and the severity of, or vulnerability to, sexual violence and revictimisation, and to build the capacity of the SXA and AOD sectors to respond more effectively to the needs of affected individuals. The project involved: i) a detailed literature review; ii) face-to-face qualitative interviews and a quantitative online survey with clinicians, managers and peak bodies; and iii) a forum/workshop to bring together the practice knowledge and needs of both sectors.

Key Findings: Most practitioners and clinicians were aware of the interrelationship between sexual victimisation and substance use, but many lacked access to resources, formal referral processes and pathways, or information about how the other sector works – all tools which would assist them to respond to clients with complex co-occurring issues. Both sectors identified the importance of resourcing and formalising governance and collaborative structures.

Discussions and Conclusions: The new knowledge generated by this research resulted in the development of shared Practice Guidelines to guide practice toward the identification, assessment, response and referral of clients with co-occurring sexual victimisation and substance use issues. This presentation will highlight key findings from the research and showcase the recently released Practice Guidelines.

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