

Multi-disciplinary Evaluation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres for better Health (MESARCH)

Mesarch Cohort Study - Participant Information Sheet (service users)

Why have I been invited to take part?

Thank you for taking the time to read about our project. This project is raising awareness across England about society's response to sexual assault and sexual abuse and how it affects people's lives, aiming to ensure that individuals who have been affected by such experiences get the best care and support possible. If you are 18 years or above and have attended a participating Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), we want to give you a voice as part of this project. Our project involves inviting people into a survey with follow-up over two years. The project is called Mesarch and it is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

SARCs and community-based organisations that support victims of assault across England consider this work important. We are inviting service users over 18 years old who attend any of the 16 SARCs participating in our project up to April 2021 to join us in our study.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even if you join, you can still withdraw at any time by letting a member of the project team know; email mesarch@coventry.ac.uk, phone 02477 659367 or text 07785 939958. There are no consequences to withdrawing and you do not have to explain your choice to anyone; staff at the SARC you attended will not be made aware of your decisions to participate or to withdraw.

If I choose to take part, what will happen?

You are invited to complete a set of questionnaires at 4 points in time over a 2-year period. This can be done over the phone, via Zoom/video link, or in-person with one of our trained staff at a time that is convenient to you. The questionnaires ask standardised or structured questions about your health and quality of life, including your mental and sexual wellbeing, your use of services, use of alcohol and drugs. It will ask about experiences of domestic violence in the past and childhood difficulties. However, we are careful *not* to ask questions about the experience that brought you to the SARC. At any time, you are free to decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable but remain in the project. We think that completing the survey will take around 1 hour. You will have the opportunity to take as many breaks as you wish and should you prefer, you can complete the survey over two interviews.

The study will invite you to complete a survey and then to take part in a 6 month, 1 and 2 year follow-up. We would send you an email, text or phone reminder (depending on your preferences) notifying you that it is time to complete the follow-up. We will contact you to arrange a time. We can offer a small token of thanks - £10 for each of the first three surveys and £20 at the 2-year follow-up. These will be shopping vouchers which can either be sent to you via email or posted to you. If you incur travel expenses in order to complete an interview, we will reimburse these.

What are the risks associated with this project?

We will ask you about your health and wellbeing but will not ask questions about the experience that brought you to the SARC. You may find being asked certain questions difficult. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed at any time during sharing information with us, you are welcome to take a break, skip certain questions, stop the survey completely, or withdraw from the study. We think it is important that you appreciate the flexibility around your involvement. As your wellbeing and safety are paramount, our study is designed and run with the input of a team of individuals with lived experiences of sexual abuse or assault. At the beginning, the interviewer will make a “verbal contract” with you about what can be discussed and make you aware about how the disclosure of new information relevant to a live case could be called on as evidence in court. Sharing information that indicates there may be an immediate risk of harm to you or a risk to the safety and welfare of a child or vulnerable adult would be grounds for breaking confidentiality.

What are the benefits of taking part?

We would like you to help us understand what works about the services you have received and help identify changes that could assist others in the future. You could be joining hundreds of other people across the country, contributing to a large-scale evaluation about the extent to which SARCs meet the needs of service users and survivors of sexual violence. This work has potential to increase understanding about the impacts of violence across the lifespan and influence what is done to support people’s recovery journeys. We hope to improve access to SARCs and other services for individuals with lived experience of sexual assault or sexual abuse and raise the visibility of sexual violence as a widespread problem with devastating effects on individuals, families and communities. With your help, we can make a difference.

Data protection & confidentiality

Coventry University is the sponsor for this study and is based in the UK. We will be using information from you and your SARC record in order to undertake this study and will act as the data controller for this study. This includes special category personal data and/or criminal offence data. This means that we are responsible for complying with data protection legislation (GDPR, 2018). Coventry University will keep identifiable information about you until 31/12/2023 unless you consent to being followed-up for future research, beyond the end of MESARCH; in this situation, your data would be stored until 31/12/2028. Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible. Individuals from Coventry University and regulatory organisations may look at your SARC and research records to check the accuracy of the research study. The research process is that the SARC will pass minimal anonymous information about you to Coventry University and we will generate a unique research ID for you.

The SARC staff, or ISVA or other suitably qualified staff member of a participating provider organisation, will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study, and ensure that relevant information about the study is recorded for your care. If you consent to being in the project, this information will become identifiable to the project. If you decline to be contacted

or decline to enter the study, it is fully anonymised. The only people in Coventry University who will have access to information that identifies you will be people who need to contact you to for conducting interviews or to audit the data collection process. The people who analyse the information will not be able to identify you and will not be able to find out your name or contact details. The information collected will be stored in a password protected file at Coventry University. Personal data will be stored separately to other data provided to the project and these sources will be linked by an ID. We are committed to the protection and security of your personal data. We will ensure that appropriate measures are taken against its unlawful or unauthorised processing, and against its accidental loss or damage. We are certified to Cyber Essentials. Your participation in the research, your personal data and the information you share with our team will not be shared with services you attend or other institutions. The only exception concerns where there is a risk of immediate harm to you, a child or vulnerable adult, or a court orders information collected as part of the research. Questions, comments or requests about your personal data can be sent to DSAR@coventry.ac.uk.

What will happen with the results of the study?

The results from the study will be used to help us understand the range of ways in which SARCs impact the lives of individuals who have experienced sexual assault or abuse. These results will be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations, and summaries for participants and members of the public will be made available on our website. Individual participants will not be identifiable from any report or publication placed in the public domain.

Who has reviewed this study and what if something goes wrong?

This study has received ethics approval from Coventry University Ethics Committee and the Health Research Authority (East Midlands Research Ethics Committee). Appropriate approvals have also been sought from the SARC you attended and, if applicable, the ISVA service you attended. If you have any comments or complaints you wish to raise in regards to how you have been treated, please contact the ProVice Chancellor for Research using the address: ethics.uni@coventry.ac.uk.

The team, the funder and where to get further information

Dr Lorna O'Doherty is the Mesarch project lead. Her work is in the area of mental health and abuse: <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/persons/lorna-odoherty>. The project is funded by the NIHR and was commissioned because of a recognised gap in understanding about SARC best practice. For enquiries about the project, please contact a member of our team at mesarch@coventry.ac.uk or phone 02477659367 or 02477657470. You can find out more at www.mesarch.coventry.ac.uk. If you have any concerns about your safety or wellbeing, consider talking to a trusted family member or friend or you could get in touch with one of the services listed overleaf or on our website. You can reach the police on 101 or if you are at immediate risk of harm, dial 999.

National services

- *Rape Crisis England & Wales*

For help and support, call the national helpline on 0808 802 9999 or visit www.rapecrisis.org.uk

- *The Survivors Trust: Supporting Survivors of Rape & Sexual Abuse*

For specialist support services in your area visit www.thesurvivorstrust.org or call 0808 801 0818

- *24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline*

Call 0808 2000 247 or visit www.womensaid.org.uk

- *Karma Nirvana*

Supporting victims of honour crimes and forced marriage, call the helpline on 0800 5999 247 9am-5pm Monday to Friday or visit www.karmanirvana.org.uk

- *MIND – the mental health charity*

Visit www.mind.org.uk

- *Samaritans*

Whatever support you need, call them free on 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org

- *Male Survivors Partnership*

Call the helpline on 0808 800 5005 or visit www.malesurvivor.co.uk

- *NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood)*

Call 0808 801 0331 or visit www.napac.org.uk

- *Childline*

Free, confidential and available any time, day or night. Call 0800 1111 or visit www.childline.org.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read about our project



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