

Justice Journeys: Informing policy and practice through lived experience.

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Background to the research

The principal focus of this research, funded by the Scottish Government (Justice Analytical Services), is on victim-survivors of rape and sexual assault and their end-to-end experiences of the criminal justice system. It comprises in-depth interviews with 17 participants who reported rape and/or serious sexual assault in Scotland. The research seeks to develop a greater understanding of victim-survivor' experiences and perspectives of criminal justice with a view to informing and improving policy and practice developments in the area.

The research aims to gain fuller understanding of victim-survivors of rape and sexual assault and:

- their expectations and 'end to end' experiences of the Scottish criminal justice process;
- the range of factors affecting their decisions to engage/discontinue in the criminal justice process; and
- the factors that support their engagement and giving of 'best' evidence.

Key objectives of the research are to:

- develop better understanding of the factors that affect victim-survivors engagement with, and experiences of, the criminal justice system;
- identify ways in which victim-survivors' experiences of the criminal justice system could be improved; and
- improve the support available to victim-survivors reporting rape and serious sexual crime.

Overview of participants

Recruitment to the current study took two forms. First, the research team sought formal ethical approval to re-contact victim-survivor interviewees who had previously participated in an evaluation of the Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) National Advocacy Service in Scotland (Brooks-Hay et al., 2018) in order to seek their informed consent to re-analyse their earlier interviews for this new purpose, and request an additional interview with them to pursue the research questions more directly. Second, victim-survivors who did not participate in the evaluation were recruited via local Advocacy Workers, RCS and self-referrals following publicity to accompany the launch of the research. Participants were mostly female (16) and one was male, with an age range of 16–65 years old. The majority (14) knew their assailant, who was either a current partner, ex-partner, family friend or neighbour. Of these, three took place in a context of domestic abuse.

Interviews took place within two years of cases concluding, however, five of the interviewees were discussing historic cases, where the rape and/or sexual assault took place between 10 years, 28 years, 35 years and 40 years earlier, respectively. Participants had reached a range of conclusions in the criminal justice process, the outcomes of which are depicted in the table below:

<i>Stage reached in CJ process</i>	<i>Outcome / verdict</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Police	Did not proceed	2
Prosecution	Insufficient evidence	3
Court	Guilty plea	1
	No case to answer	3
	Guilty Verdict	2
	Not proven	3
	Sexual offences not proven, guilty to non-sexual offences	1
	Sexual offences dropped, guilty to non-sexual offences	2

Plans for dissemination

The findings from this research are due to be published by report in summer, 2019. The work is also linked to a Justice Journeys creative project which adopts collaborative, arts-based methods to support participants in writing and representing (through photos, audio and objects) a case study of their 'journey'. The production of a curated book of case-studies, accompanying website, and exhibition of the case studies in various locations, are to follow throughout 2019/20. This work is funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account.