

MOTIVATIONS, BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO WORK AS SEXUAL ASSAULT EXAMINERS IN NSW, AUSTRALIA

Authors:

Edmiston N^{1,2,3}, Freedman E², Sperring S¹, Power R¹, Evans K⁴

¹Western Sydney University, ²NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence, Western Sydney Local Health District, ³Northern NSW Local Health District, ⁴South West Sydney Local Health District

Background:

Throughout Australia, there are significant shortages of sexual assault examiners. Doctors and nurses with New South Wales (NSW) Health Sexual Assault Services (SAS), provide medical care and forensic examinations as part of an integrated psychosocial, medical and forensic crisis response to people who have experienced sexual assault. This study aimed to understand the motivations, barriers and enablers for nurses and doctors to work as examiners in NSW, Australia.

Methods:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 participants (27 (87%) female; 23 (74%) doctors), who were currently working as examiners in NSW Health SAS, or within the last three years had left the role or undertaken training to work as an examiner. Recruitment was by email invitation from NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV). Videoconference interviews occurred from May to August 2023. Inductive and deductive coding was used for thematic analysis of the transcripts. The study received ethics approval from WSLHD HREC (ref. no. 2022/ETH01945).

Results:

We determined four key themes affecting workforce participation. The responsibility burden; The sexual assault medical workforce was highly motivated and in the absence of sufficient organisational support, this became a responsibility burden. On-call challenges; For many, the most challenging aspect of their role was being predominantly on-call, which made them feel isolated and affected preferred mechanisms for managing the traumatic aspects of the work, which were peer support and compartmentalisation. Medicolegal role; Medicolegal aspects of the role were motivating for some but represented a significant barrier for many due to high expectations and unfamiliarity. Additional support requirements; Despite the valued role of education, it was insufficient to support the workforce in the face of significant organisational challenges.

Conclusion:

Improved work conditions including adequate on-call staff and additional support can overcome some of the barriers and maintain the motivation to participate in the SAS workforce.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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