

Improving care for intoxicated women assault victims

October 22 2014, by David Ellis

New research at the University of Adelaide could lead to improvements in professional health care for women who experience physical or sexual assault while under the influence of alcohol.

The study, being conducted by Research Officer Amy Marshall, a sociologist and PhD student in the University's School of Nursing, aims to better understand how emergency care workers respond to intoxicated female victims.

"Women who are intoxicated when they are physically or sexually assaulted are a highly vulnerable group," Ms Marshall says.

"It's clear from past research that intoxicated women are subjected to a higher level of public scrutiny than men. Not only does this group of women deal with the physical and mental health consequences of being assaulted, but they also feel marginalised, demonised and blamed by members of the community, often including friends and relatives, for both their intoxication and their victimisation.

"Emergency care workers are among the first people to assist these women, and so their attitudes and responses are important to the victims' ongoing physical and mental wellbeing," she says.

In interviews with emergency care workers, Ms Marshall found a high level of care and concern for intoxicated women who experience physical or [sexual assault](#).

"Most [health care workers](#) expressed sympathy for the victims and overall concern about the problems of alcohol use and [violence against women](#). Many of the workers feel the need to help these women beyond just their [physical health](#), such as making phone calls to family, friends or social workers on their behalf.

"Among emergency care workers, there is an apparent lack of understanding as to why women often don't leave an abusive partner, and a lack of awareness of what resources are available for them to offer women in such a situation."

Ms Marshall hopes her research will lead to improvements in care for female victims of sexual and physical abuse.

"Ultimately our aim is to lead to the best holistic care for [women](#) who experience this trauma in their lives, and for people's attitudes towards them to change," she says.

"Emergency care workers are highly trained and skilled, but they also need more specific information and training to effectively deal with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. This will be one of the recommendations in my PhD thesis."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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