

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Ms Libby Eltringham

Organisation Name:CASA Forum

Your position or role: Policy Officer

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Drag the statements below to reorder them. In order of priority, please rank the themes you believe are most important for this inquiry into homelessness to consider::

Family violence,Services,Mental health,Public housing,Housing affordability,Rough sleeping,Indigenous people,Employment

What best describes your interest in our Inquiry? (select all that apply) :

An advocacy body ,A peak body

Are there any additional themes we should consider?

Links between sexual assault and homelessness- sexual assault as a driver of homelessness; and homelessness as a risk factor for further perpetration of sexual assault.

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

See attached submission.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

CASA Forum can provide experts to appear before the Inquiry to speak to the issues raised in our submission.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [5e27e77836872-200122CASA ForumSubmission HomelessnessInquiryFINAL.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Libby Eltringham



CASA Forum

Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault

Victorian Parliament Legislative Council
Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

Submission
January 2020

Karen Hogan
Convenor- CASA Forum
Manager- Gatehouse Centre
P: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Libby Eltringham
Policy Officer - CASA Forum
P: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Contents

ABOUT CASA FORUM	3
INTRODUCTION	4
SEXUAL ASSAULT IN AUSTRALIA	5
Personal Safety Survey (PSS).....	5
Victorian Crime Statistics Agency	5
CASA client data for 2018-2019 financial year	5
Some groups experience higher rates of sexual assault than others	6
SEXUAL ASSAULT – IMPACT AND TRAUMA	7
SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HOMELESSNESS	8
Sexual assault as a driver of homelessness	8
Homelessness increases the risk of sexual victimisation.....	9
Homelessness increases the risk factor for further perpetration of sexual assault	10
RECOMMENDATIONS	11
Recommendation 1:.....	11
Recommendation 2:.....	11
Recommendation 3:.....	11

ABOUT CASA FORUM

CASA Forum was established in 1992 and is the peak body for fifteen Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs) in Victoria, including the Victorian after-hours Sexual Assault Crisis Line (SACL).

CASAs are funded by the Victorian Government to provide a range of sexual assault counselling, crisis and support services to victims/survivors of sexual assault, and their family members. We provide crisis care responses to victims of recent assaults and to recent disclosures of sexual assault. The majority of crisis care responses are provided to women, children and young people.

CASAs also provide Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services (SABTS) to children and young people presenting with sexually harmful behaviours.

CASAs work with all victims of sexual assault and sexual violence, including women, children, young people and men. Many are women who have experienced sexual assault in an intimate partner relationship or were sexually abused as children; have experienced date rape; or sexual assault by a stranger or recent acquaintance; or sexual assault within an institutional setting.

Children and young people make up a large proportion of CASA clients. They have most often been sexually abused by a family member or someone they know and trust. Children and young people who receive services from the SABT programs are frequently identified as having abused siblings or related family members.

While the number of male victims accessing our services has increased, many are men seeking support to deal with the impact of historical childhood sexual assault perpetrated by male family members, by friends, or within institutional settings or same sex assaults.

Increasingly, CASAs are receiving referrals and requests for support from people in same sex relationships, and LGBTIQ community members.

INTRODUCTION

CASA Forum welcomes the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

Sexual assault occurs along a continuum of sexually abusive and violent behaviour. The continuum spans from uninvited sexual behaviour that makes the recipient feel uncomfortable, harassed or afraid; unwanted touching or remarks; sexual harassment; coerced sexual activity; to rape with physical violence and threat to life. Sexual assault is both a consequence and a reinforcer of the power disparity existing between men, and women and children. It occurs within families and in multiple other settings and types of relationships.

Responding to clients who are victim /survivors of sexual assault is core business for CASAs. Our clients present in crisis, arising from past or recent sexual assault. Many report that they have struggled for years trying to find appropriate support to help them deal with and recover from the trauma and impact of their experiences.

This submission provides information about the nature, prevalence, impacts and health costs of sexual assault in our community, and the critical role that safe and affordable housing plays in mitigating the serious impacts for victim survivors and in preventing sexual assault.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN AUSTRALIA

Sexual assault in Australia is prevalent; it occurs across all age groups; it is largely gendered in that most victim survivors are female, and most perpetrators are male; and it has lasting impacts for victim survivors. A selection of recent research is outlined below and highlights the prevalence and nature of sexual assault within Australian society.

Personal Safety Survey (PSS)

The *Personal Safety Survey (PSS)*¹, a national survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics every four years (2008, 2012, 2016, and will next be run in 2020), collects detailed information from men and women (over 18) about the nature of violence experienced since the age of 15. It is the most comprehensive data source on the prevalence of violence (including family, domestic and sexual violence) in Australia.

The 2016 PSS found that, in Australia, since the age of 15:

- One in five women has experienced sexual violence, compared to one in 21 men.
- One in three women has experienced violence by a person known to them, compared to one in four men.

The 2016 PSS also showed that, over time:

- Sexual violence against women increased between 2012 and 2016, from 1.2% to 1.8%.

In the most recent incident of sexual assault by a male:

- Women were most likely to experience sexual assault by a male they knew (87% or 553,700).
- The location of the most recent incident was most likely to be in the respondent's home (40% or 252,400) or in the perpetrator's home (17% or 109,400).
- The majority of women (9 out of 10) did not contact the police (87% or 553,900).

Victorian Crime Statistics Agency²

- In the year ending 31 December 2016, Victoria Police recorded 12,956 sexual offences across the state, up by 45.0%, up from 8,936 offences in the year ending 31 December 2012.
- Of the 12,956 recorded sexual offences, 16.2% (2,095) remained unsolved as at 18 January 2017.
- 21.3% (2,754) of offences resulted in an arrest and 24.3% (3,146) resulted in a summons being issued.
- Of 7,788 victim reports, 79.7% (6,204) involved a female victim while 18.8% (1,467) involved a male victim. The remaining victim reports involved a victim where sexual identity was unknown.

CASA client data for 2018-2019 financial year³

A snapshot of CASA client data showed that across the state in 2018-2019, our member services worked with over 16,000 clients:

- Approx. 65% were adults; 35% were children and young people (aged 0-17).

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). The Personal Safety Survey 2016. Canberra: ABS

² Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, (2017) Sexual Offences in Victoria 2016. Crime Statistics Agency, Melbourne. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/news/sexual-offences-in-victoria-0>

³ CASA Forum (2019). State Budget Submission. Melbourne 2019.

- Approx. 86% of all adult clients were female; 14% were male; and less than .006% identified as gender diverse.
- Approx. 56% of children receiving CASA services were female; and 44% were male.
- Approx. 70% of the adolescents /young people receiving CASA services were female; 28% were male; and .007% identified as gender diverse.

CASA services provided in excess of 1600 crisis care responses⁴:

- 72% females; 11% males; and 17% gender was not identified.
- Approx. 10% of crisis care responses were provided to children under 11 years of age; and 21% to young people aged 12-17 years.

The Sexual Assault Crisis Line in the same period responded to 15,373 calls for assistance and support.

Some groups experience higher rates of sexual assault than others

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - three in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced sexual or physical abuse by an intimate partner since the age of 15 (Cox, P, 2015)⁵

People with diverse gender identities experience sexual violence and coercion at 4 times the rates of others in the community (Callander et al, 2019)⁶

Women in custodial settings: In a survey of 100 women in SE Queensland prisons, 95% had experienced abuse prior to imprisonment - 98% physical abuse, 89% sexual abuse, 70% emotional abuse and 16% ritual abuse. The majority of women experienced this abuse in childhood and 37% before the age of 5. (Kilroy, 2000)⁷

People with disabilities: The 2016 Personal Safety Survey found that women with disabilities experienced double the rate of sexual violence in the previous 12 months compared to women without disabilities (1.7 compared to 0.9 per cent) (Dowse et al (2016)).⁸

⁴ CASAs provide an immediate 24-hour crisis care response service for victim/survivors of sexual assault. All CASAs have access to at least one Crisis Care Unit, which may be located in a Multidisciplinary Centre (MDC), hospital or a community-based agency.

⁵ Cox, P. (2015). *Sexual assault and domestic violence in the context of co-occurrence and re-victimisation: State of knowledge paper* (ANROWS Landscapes, 13/2015). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

⁶ Callander D., Wiggins J., Rosenberg S., Cornelisse V. J., Duck-Chong E., Holt M., Pony M., Vlahakis E., MacGibbon J., & Cook T. (2019). The 2018 Australian Trans and Gender Diverse sexual health survey: Report of Findings. Sydney, NSW: The Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney. DOI: 10.26190/5d7ed96ceaa70

⁷ Kilroy, D. (2000). *When Will You See The Real Us? Women In Prison*. Sisters Inside Inc. Queensland.

⁸ Dowse, L., Soldatic, K., Didi, A., Frohmader, C., & van Toorn, G. (2013). *Stop the Violence: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia. Background Paper*. Retrieved from Western Sydney University ResearchDirect website <http://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:36865>

SEXUAL ASSAULT – IMPACT AND TRAUMA

Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life (Judith Herman, 1992).⁹

Sexual abuse damages that which is at the core of self, (...). To some degree or other, relational traumata are attacks upon humanity (Meares, 2019).¹⁰

The impact of sexual assault on the lives of victim/survivors is multi-faceted and complex. It includes emotional, social, psychological, legal, health and political consequences. The impact can be compounded by intersectional factors and identities including gender, culture, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, ability and socio-economic class.

Victim/survivors often don't disclose sexual assault until many years after the sexual abuse has occurred. Health professionals often respond in less than supportive ways or inappropriately. Such responses are likely to exacerbate a person's distress. (Lanthier, Du Mont et al. 2018).¹¹

Sexual abuse, in particular childhood sexual abuse, can have enduring and devastating effects on a person, in particular if the trauma is not addressed, kept a secret, or if the person is not believed or not supported following disclosure (Anda, Felitti et al. 2005).¹²

Judith Herman first coined the term 'complex trauma' to describe the effects of abuse during childhood or adulthood and the sequelae as Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Herman 1992, Herman 2017, Kezelman 2019).¹³

CASA clients report extensive and long-lasting impacts of sexual assault. Reported impacts included hypervigilance, anxiety, intrusive thoughts and flashbacks, nightmares, difficulty with emotion regulation, depression; increased anger, blame and shame and suicide attempts.

Many report feelings of fear and isolation, powerlessness, guilt at not reporting the assault earlier and feelings of self-blame and low self-worth.

Sexual assault also impacts on relationships, on other family members, and on access to services. Some experience physical health issues caused or exacerbated by the trauma.

Homelessness can result as victims seek safety from sexual assault and abusive relationships. The Victorian Council to Homeless Persons defines homelessness as:

⁹ Herman, J. (1992). Trauma and recovery. The aftermath of violence-from domestic abuse to political terror. New York, Basic Books.

¹⁰ Meares, R. (2019). The human brain-mind system. In: Humanising mental health care in Australia. A guide to trauma-informed approaches. R. Benjamin, J. Haliburn and S. King. New York, Routledge: 31-42.

¹¹ Lanthier, S., J. Du Mont and R. Mason (2018). "Responding to delayed disclosure of sexual assault in health settings: A systematic review." Trauma, Violence & Abuse **19**(3): 251-265.

¹² Anda, R., V. Felitti, J. Bremner, J. Walker, C. Whitfield, B. Perry, S. Dube and W. Giles (2005). "The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood. A convergence of evidence from neurobiology and epidemiology." European Archive of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience **256**(3): 174-186.

¹³ Kezelman, C. (2019). Childhood trauma-the long-term impact and the human cost. Humanising mental health care in Australia. A guide to trauma-informed approaches. R. Benjamin, J. Haliburn and S. King. New York, Routledge.

...about not having a home – ‘home’lessness, not rooflessness. A home means a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space (Mallet, 2004)...

...Contrary to popular belief, the majority of people who experience homelessness aren’t rough sleepers (living on the streets). In fact, rough sleeping only makes up around 7% of homelessness while the remainder is ‘hidden homelessness’, that is, people sleeping in cars, rooming houses, couch surfing, or staying in other temporary types of accommodation.¹⁴

For victim survivors, barriers to accessing suitable service responses including safe and affordable housing can compound the impacts of sexual assault. Similarly, being able to access appropriate service supports can mitigate those impacts and aid safety, justice and recovery.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HOMELESSNESS

There is ample research that identifies the links between sexual assault and homelessness.

In particular, researchers have identified:

- sexual assault is a driver of homelessness
- homelessness increases the risk of sexual victimisation
- homelessness increases the risk for further perpetration of sexual assault.

These findings are supported by CASAs work with victim survivors of sexual assault.

Sexual assault as a driver of homelessness

For some victims of sexual assault, fleeing from an unsafe home, or the place where they have experienced sexual assault or continue to be assaulted can seem like a better option than staying, even if the alternative is further unsafe or unstable housing. This can lead to less safety, long-term patterns of homelessness, and vulnerability to ongoing sexual abuse and violence.

The intersection between sexual victimization and homeless youth has been well documented, both as an antecedent for running away and as a consequence of doing so. Sexual victimization emerges prominently as a cause of homelessness in several studies... while others illustrate how sexual victimization becomes a prevailing feature of life on the streets.¹⁵

A US National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2010 Factsheet on *Housing & Sexual Violence* pulled together research findings that identified the connections between sexual violence, housing and oppression. For sexual violence victims

...safe and affordable housing is often even further out of reach, due to the effects of trauma, economic insecurity, and lack of resources in the aftermath of sexual violence. The majority of sexual assaults take place in or near victims’ homes or the homes of victims’ friends, relatives, or neighbors (Mindlin & Vickers, 2007)¹⁶

¹⁴ Council to Homeless Persons.(2018). *Facts about homelessness*. <https://chp.org.au/homelessness/>

¹⁵ Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Research & Advocacy Digest (2004). *Homeless, Runaway & Throwaway Youth: Sexual Victimization and the Consequences of Life on the Streets*. WCSAP, Volume 7 | 1 October 2004

¹⁶ National Sexual Violence Resource Center, (2010). *Housing and Sexual Violence Factsheet*. US. www.nsvrc.org

Homelessness increases the risk of sexual victimisation

In 2019 Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) published a research synthesis on *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness*¹⁷. A key issue identified *that women at risk of homelessness sometimes engage in intimate relationships and "survival sex"*:

...For some young women at risk of experiencing homelessness, sex and intimate relationships are among the few resources at their disposal (Watson, 2018). "Survival sex" typically refers to the exchange of sex for necessities, such as food, accommodation and safety, and can be a feature of intimate relationships (Watson, 2018). Some young women engage in "survival sex" in order to secure material support and physical protection, but also for emotional security and stability (Watson, 2018). Young women experiencing homelessness must also negotiate expectations that they are willing to exchange sex for necessities (Watson, 2018).

A 2008 Australian Institute of Criminology paper, *Homeless people: their risk of victimisation*, reported that:

...compared with the public, homeless people were 13 times more likely to have experienced violence and 47 times more likely to have been victims of theft.

Almost one-tenth of those interviewed had experienced sexual assault in the last year...

[and ... few homeless people report being the victim of a crime or anti-social behaviour because of their fear of the police and the social exclusion they may perceive or experience more generally.¹⁸

Without timely and appropriate support, victim survivors of sexual assault who become homeless risk being trapped in a cycle of ongoing abuse and victimisation, escalating physical and mental health risks and marginalisation. Because sexual assault is largely a gendered crime, women who are homeless are at increased risk.

One CASA that works with incarcerated women has reported that some women exiting prison often return to the home of the offending partner due to a lack of other housing options. They then reoffend to escape the abuse of the violent partner and end up back in prison.

A 2017 consumer survey conducted by the Northern and Western Homelessness Network in Melbourne asked service users about the emergency accommodation they were referred to by homelessness agencies.

Consumers reported feeling unsafe, demoralised by the squalor they witnessed, with a growing sense of worthlessness and disconnection from their community...

¹⁷ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2019). *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis (2nd Ed.; ANROWS Insights, 07/2019)*. Sydney, NSW: ANROWS

¹⁸ Australian Institute of Criminology. (2008). *Homeless people : their risk of victimisation*. AICrime reduction matters no. 66. Canberra.: <https://aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm066>

Women reported that it was ‘horrible, ‘terrible’, and that they feared violence and rape (one woman reported a rape in emergency accommodation). They said that it was ‘unclean’, ‘not appropriate for children’, that there were ‘no cooking facilities and nowhere to store food’¹⁹

A 2006 US National Resource Center on Domestic Violence paper on the links between sexual assault and homelessness proposed that:

... homeless women are raped more than housed women, [and] addressing the grave shortage of affordable housing would not only reduce the rates of homelessness, it would reduce sexual assault... These approaches must be especially sensitive to homeless women who face greater stigma, discrimination, and barriers to access on the basis of race/ethnicity/citizenship status, sexual orientation, economic survival strategies, disabilities, or child custody.²⁰

For young people fleeing sexual and other violence at home or in their community, life on the streets or in insecure housing also compounds the risk of sexual victimisation:

Instead of finding the refuge they seek, once on the street, they are further exposed to a multitude of risks including rape, sexual victimization, prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation enterprises. Because they are disconnected and disenfranchised from community and lack access to schools, health care and other support systems, many are forced to turn to survival strategies including engaging in survival sex or the trading of sex to meet basic, substantive needs, leading to increased risk for HIV, STDs, unwanted pregnancies and other physical health issues. To deaden the pain of their existence on the streets, many homeless youth turn to substance abuse; engage in self-harm, or suicide, all with potentially life-threatening consequences.²¹

Homelessness increases the risk factor for further perpetration of sexual assault

The NSVRC 2010 Factsheet on *Housing & Sexual Violence* further highlighted research that flagged that:

Safe, affordable, and stable housing can be a protective factor against both sexual violence perpetration and victimization. Research on sex offender treatment and management finds that stable housing, supportive resources, and employment are critical to preventing recidivism.²²

The nature of trauma experienced by survivors of sexual assault demands timely service responses that are trauma informed and informed by evidence about the prevalence and gendered nature of sexual assault. This includes trauma informed gender sensitive homelessness service supports.

¹⁹ Northern and Western Homelessness Network. (2017) *A Crisis in Crisis The appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne’s north and west* Northern and Western Homelessness Network Annual Consumer Survey 2017

²⁰ VAW Net, US National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2006) *No Safe Place: Sexual Assault in the Lives of Homeless Women*. www.vawnet.org

²¹ Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Research & Advocacy Digest (2004). *Homeless, Runaway & Throwaway Youth: Sexual Victimization and the Consequences of Life on the Streets*. WCSAP, Volume 7 | 1 October 2004

²² https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Factsheet_Housing-and-Sexual-Violence.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

The systems that impact homeless women who are sexual assault survivors require new funds, new forms of collaboration such as trauma-informed homeless services, and the combined energies and resources of funders, policy makers, service providers, and communities.²³

Recommendation 1:

Ensure that the particular and complex nature of sexual assault in homes, institutions and in the community underpins and informs the homelessness service system to ensure it is trauma informed and able to meet the needs of victim survivors.

Paradoxically it can be those who have been most severely harmed and marginalised because of their experience of sexual assault, who require safe and affordable housing in order to recover, who find it hardest to access and /or maintain it.

The impact of sexual assault as a driver and as a consequence of homelessness, particularly for women, needs to inform the homelessness service system redesign and be embedded in policy, practice and steer investment of resources.

Recommendation 2:

Invest in gender sensitive crisis and housing services and housing stock, to ensure victim survivors of sexual assault and women in particular have safe and secure housing options and support and safety packages as they navigate their way to safety. For others who experience sexual assault at higher rates, including people who are transgender, or identify as gender diverse, similar targeted policy considerations and housing options need to apply.

This must include increased resources for wrap-around services and support for victim survivors to enable recovery from the trauma of sexual assault.

Recommendation 3:

Build stronger linkages between sexual assault specialist services, and housing and homelessness services. Establish capacity building strategies to support homelessness sector workers to inquire about and respond to disclosures of sexual assault.

²³ <https://vawnet.org/material/no-safe-place-sexual-assault-lives-homeless-women>