



Dismantling the justice silos: flowcharting the role and expertise of forensic science, medicine and law in adult sexual assault investigations

Editorial:

Forensic science is increasingly used by criminal justice personnel to assist in exonerating the innocent and establishing links to crime. With the increased use of forensic science the risk of unjust outcomes increases. One reason is the more serious the matter the more likely practitioners involved in a case are multi-disciplinary (police, medicine, law, forensic science), and multi-organisational in the private and government sectors (Health, Justice, legal, police). The importance of identifying effective multi-organisational information sharing is to prevent the 'justice silo effect'. This is where practitioners from different organisations operate in isolation (with minimal or no information/expertise sharing). In this presentation the findings from a large Australia-wide project will be discussed. This project explored the extent of justice silos within Australia. We interviewed 121 police, scientists, lawyers, judges, coroners, and forensic medical practitioners. Two

key findings from an initial analysis were that investigative meetings were rare in adult sexual assault cases, and further, many medical practitioners were invisible in investigative decision-making with this low level of visibility being due to lawyers, forensic scientists or police not being aware of the expertise these practitioners offer. The aim of the current aspect of this project was to develop a flowchart that mapped the forensic and evidentiary process from initial reporting by an adult victim of sexual assault to the trial preparation stage. The flowchart would map the different agencies and practitioners involved in each step and include forensic feedback loops to advise practitioners of the quality of the evidence they collected/analysed. The rationale for creating this flowchart was to provide a visual aid that would identify the range of different agencies. By highlighting who was involved in a typical adult sexual assault investigation this flowchart could act as a means of preventing agency and practitioner silos.