

Changing the way we do business: Managing Sexual Assault in Victoria, Australia

Professor Jenny Fleming, Director, Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies

Monday 16th May, 14.00 – 15.30

Room 204, Alexander Stone Building, University of Glasgow

Directions: 16 University Gardens, G12 8QL (Building D5 on the Campus Map)

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_1887_en.pdf

In recent decades, criminal justice agencies have been criticised for the quality of services offered to sexual assault victims. Attrition - the process by which the majority of sexual assault cases fail to reach trial - has become the focus of much research and government policy in Australia and elsewhere. The general consensus is that the criminal justice system is not sufficiently responsive to the needs of sexual offence victims. Police, as 'gatekeepers' to the criminal justice system, have been consistently criticised for their perceived inability to progress sexual assault complaints and their apparent failure to protect and support victims. Extensive legislative and procedural reforms and other initiatives have done little to dispel these perceptions, especially in the face of research that indicates these reforms have not resulted in any tangible change. In recent years there has been a move to the provision of coordinated service responses to sexual assault to encourage a more 'victim-centred' approach to the investigation of sexual assault.

Victoria Police has embraced this coordinated service approach in two ways. First, through its organisational transition from individual sexual assault units and criminal investigation detectives (SOCAU/CIU) to more formally integrated sexual offence criminal investigation teams (SOCIT). Second, moving beyond the protocol/MOU approach to a coordinated service response, Victoria Police has also successfully trialled the implementation of two multidisciplinary units (MDUs) that bring together and co-locate police, counsellors, forensic management teams and Department of Health Services.

The paper provides a snapshot of the statistics available about the experience of sexual assault investigation in Australia with an emphasis on the Victorian experience. It discusses the transition from SOCAU to SOCIT in Victoria Police and outlines the organisational challenges that the transition brings. It looks at the progress of the MDUs and considers the use of such organisational hybrids as a way forward for managing sexual assault generally.



Jenny Fleming is Research Professor and Director of the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) at the University of Tasmania. Professor Fleming is currently a Chief Investigator on the Australian Research Council funded Linkage Project, *Policing Just Outcomes* with Victoria Police. The project seeks to provide an understanding of the incident, nature and dynamics of adult sexual assault in Victoria and the police management of sexual assault generally. Her research interests include police management, the policing of alcohol-related activity and organisational change. She has published widely both nationally and internationally in these areas.

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Places are free, and refreshments will be provided. For catering purposes, please advise Tim Heilbronn, SIPR (t.d.heilbronn@dundee.ac.uk 01382 384205) if you wish to attend.