

## Child Sexual Abuse

### The medical & forensic evaluation of the under 8's

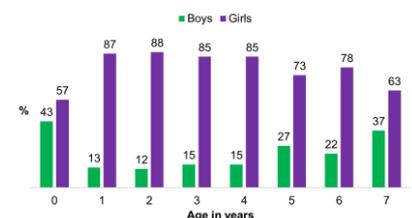
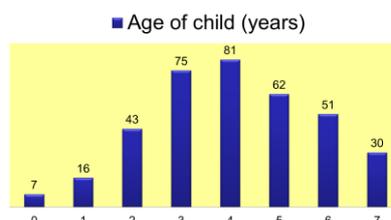
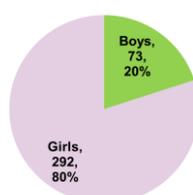
(Research by Dr Catherine White, Clinical Director at St Mary's SARC, Rebecca Treleaven, Medical Student at Manchester University and Rachel Belk, former research officer at St Mary's SARC)

- The aim of the study is to compare the outcomes of medical and forensic evaluation of girls and boys under the age of 8 years seen at a sexual assault referral centre.
- This is a retrospective, descriptive study, looking at case files (and associated anogenital examination images) of children aged 7 years or less who attended St Mary's SARC between April 2010 and March 2013. The children were referred to St Mary's SARC via the police following a multi-disciplinary assessment that involved health, police and, unless the referral was very urgent, social services following a disclosure of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (UK Government, 2003) or a strong suspicion of the above (e.g. unexplained anogenital trauma in a pre-verbal child).

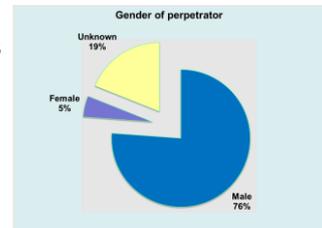
The results so far:

365 children were identified who met the inclusion criteria. Data extraction has been done on information in the medical records on all criteria included in our protocols, except for the examination findings.

- We have had an update in January 2014 from our police partners on the criminal justice process outcomes as they currently stand. We aim to get a final update on outstanding cases in June 2014. From the results so far, it is clear that many cases do not progress very far in the criminal justice system. We have yet to do the analysis to see if there are trends in which cases are more likely to proceed. The provisional results have reinforced the view that the holistic needs of the child are paramount and not just a focus on the forensic aspects of any evaluation.
- Protocols and procedures have now been discussed and agreed with the three doctors who will be involved with reviewing the anogenital examination DVDs. The plan is to have a review of this process after the first 10% of cases have been done to ensure quality control.
- Some results so far:



- In over 70% of the cases the alleged perpetrator (where this information was available) was a family member.
- St Mary's doctors were requested to produce a statement for the police in 15% of cases
- 64% of children disclosed the abuse
- No difference between boys and girls in disclosure rates
- Of those that made a disclosure, in 65% of the cases it was to their mother.
- Half of the disclosures were only made after prompting by an adult. This suggests that **if we don't ask, they won't tell**. This reinforces previous lessons about the importance of being able to communicate with children, make the time and space to speak to them in a place they feel safe to talk and then listen, really listen, to what they have to say.



Dr Catherine White

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014