



RESEARCH REPORT

Evaluation of Bravehearts' Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme

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About Bravehearts

Bravehearts has been actively contributing to the provision of child sexual assault services throughout Australia since 1997. As the first and largest registered charity specifically and holistically dedicated to addressing this issue in Australia, Bravehearts exists to protect Australian children against sexual harm.

Our Mission

To prevent child sexual assault in our society.

Our Vision

To make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child.

Our Guiding Principles

To, at all times, tenaciously pursue our Mission without fear, favour or compromise and to continually ensure that the best interests, human rights and protection of the child are placed before all other considerations.

Our Guiding Values

To at all times, do all things to serve our Mission with uncompromising integrity, respect, energy and empathy ensuring fairness, justice, and hope for all children and those who protect them.

The 3 Piers to Prevention

The work of Bravehearts is based on *3 Piers to Prevention: Educate, Empower, Protect* - Solid Foundations to Make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child. The 3 Piers are:

Educate Education for children and young people

Empower Specialist counselling and support

Training for adults, professionals, business and community

Risk Management 'ChildPlace Health & Safety' Services

Community engagement and awareness

Protect Lobbying & Legislative Reform

Research

Executive Summary

Background

The Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme (SADS) was developed by Bravehearts as a means to reduce the barriers to disclosure and reporting among adult survivors of child sexual assault. SADS currently operates in all jurisdictions across Australia and provides adult survivors with a safe and non-confrontational means of officially reporting historic cases of child sexual assault. Through SADS, survivors are able to report their experiences anonymously to police, while receiving support from Bravehearts' specialised case management and counselling staff. In reducing the barriers to disclosure, SADS also aims to increase the number of offences being reported to the authorities, which might otherwise not have come to police attention. The aim of the current project was to conduct a comprehensive internal evaluation of SADS. Specifically, the goals of this evaluation were to determine the effectiveness of SADS, to understand the processes surrounding its implementation and use, and identify areas to increase the effectiveness of the scheme.

Methods

Two key groups that engage with SADS were consulted for this evaluation. A total of 89 people who had participated in SADS during the period January 2013 – February 2015 completed surveys that addressed issues relating to sexual assault experienced, process and impact of disclosure, SADS participation, and related outcomes and perceptions of SADS processes. Additionally, four police participants from three Australian jurisdictions participated in interviews that addressed SADS-related processes, perceptions of SADS, and recommendations for improving SADS implementation processes.

Results

The results of this evaluation showed that the majority of participants who had been in contact with police as a result of their participation in SADS reported some sort of positive outcome as a result (e.g. official statement, investigation, charges laid). Police data received from one of the participating jurisdictions also showed that investigations were launched in the majority of cases where contact was made with a SADS participant, and that several arrests had been made as a result of SADS reports. SADS participants also reported a number of positive personal outcomes resulting from their participation, including the ability to heal, to take control of their experiences, and to speak out about their experiences to others. Both SADS participants and police generally viewed SADS processes favourably, however several suggestions were made for improvements to processes, including enhancing the clarity of information conveyed to and received from participants, and ensuring that follow up contact is made with all SADS participants following submission of forms.

Recommendations

As a result of this evaluation, several key recommendations have been made to enhance Bravehearts' provision of the SADS service. These recommendations include:

- Formalising the contact procedures for all SADS participants: All participants to be contacted by telephone within three working days of form submission.
- Clarifying SADS processes upon contact with participants: All participants to be informed verbally of their options for contact with police and the specific processes involved for each option.
- Modifying SADS forms to elicit all information required by police: SADS forms to specify the information that is required in order for the forms to be processed.
- Streamlining internal Bravehearts SADS processes: One contact person to be identified within Bravehearts for all SADS matters.
- Considering use of a baseline survey at time of SADS participation for ongoing pre and post evaluation.
- Promoting use of SADS through media, and particularly among males and Indigenous Australians.

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1. Introduction

Child sexual assault has been acknowledged by the World Health Organization to be a “silent health emergency” that “goes unnoticed, is grossly under-reported and poorly managed” ([World Health Organization, 2004](#)). Despite its prevalence across countries and cultures, and its potentially adverse impact on the psychological, physical, social and emotional wellbeing of child victims and adult survivors, child sexual assault is an issue that is consistently veiled in silence and secrecy ([Fontes & Plummer, 2010](#)). Although this silence in part reflects a lack of comprehensive public discourse about the issue ([Sammut, 2014](#)), it also partly stems from a common reluctance of child victims and adult survivors to disclose their victimisation. This report provides detail of an internal evaluation of Bravehearts’ alternative reporting program, the Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme (SADS), which is designed to facilitate reporting to the police by adult survivors of child sexual assault.

1.1 Child Sexual Assault - Prevalence and Consequences

It is difficult to accurately determine the rate of occurrence of child sexual assault. Incidence studies, which measure the number of new cases occurring during a one-year period, reflect only cases that are officially reported to authorities and fail to recognise the large majority of cases (estimated at 95 - 97%) that go unreported ([Martin & Silverstone, 2013](#)). Retrospective prevalence studies, meanwhile, estimate the total number of children that are sexually assaulted in childhood ([Martin & Silverstone, 2013](#)). The rates reported across prevalence studies vary widely, however, which reflects the methodological limitations that are inherent within this type of research. Factors such as the population being targeted, the definition of sexual assault that is used, the upper age limit specified as reflecting “childhood”, the wording of survey questions, and the data collection methods that are used, all influence the rates that are reported in these studies ([Cashmore & Shackel, 2014](#)). Additionally, retrospective studies are likely to produce underestimates of true prevalence, when considering that some survivors will never disclose their experiences of child sexual assault, even when asked directly about it through a survey or interview ([Cashmore & Shackel, 2014](#)).

A large example of a retrospective prevalence study is the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which had an original enrolment of greater than 17,000 participants throughout the United States of America ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014](#)). The baseline survey, for which data was collected between 1995 and 1997, revealed that 1 in 5 participants (25% of women and 16% of men) reported experiencing sexual assault before the age of 18 years ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014](#)). In Australia, two recent studies have shown slightly lower rates of occurrence; however these studies asked about experiences of sexual assault prior to the age 16, rather than 18, years. The first, a 10 year cohort study of Victorian adolescents for which retrospective sexual assault data was available for 1,745 youth at age 24, found rates of 17% for females and 7% for males ([Moore et al., 2010](#)). The second, a birth cohort study with data available for 2,461 youth at age 21, revealed rates of 21% of females and 11% of males reporting non-penetrative sexual assault, and approximately 8% of both males and females reporting penetrative sexual assault prior to 16 years of age ([Mamun et al., 2007](#)).

Several researchers have sought to provide “best estimates” of prevalence rates through collating figures from across the range of available studies. In a review of 38 independent articles corresponding to 39 prevalence studies, Pereda and colleagues (2009) found that the most frequent prevalence rate of child sexual assault reported among males was below 10%, while the most frequent rate reported among females was between 10 - 20%. Pereda et al. (2009) did find, however, that in almost 30% of the included studies, the prevalence rate for women was approximately 30%. Further, a meta-analysis of rates of child sexual assault from 217 studies published in the period from 1980 - 2008 found an overall rate of 18% for females and 8% for males (Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). The lowest rates were found in Asia (11% of females and 4% of males), while the highest rates were found among females in Australia (22%) and males in Africa (19%) (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

These studies all show child sexual assault to be alarmingly prevalent although rarely officially reported. The high rates of occurrence of child sexual assault are particularly concerning in the light of research evidence that reveals links with long-term psychological and social outcomes. Barnes and Josefowitz (2014) reviewed the wide range of negative outcomes that have been shown to be associated with experiences of child sexual assault, including psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, personality disorders and psychotic disorders, behavioural problems such as substance abuse, self-harm, eating disorders, conduct disorders and antisocial behaviour, as well as relationship difficulties, poorer physical health, and poorer educational and occupational achievement. A body of literature has also revealed links between the experience of child sexual assault and later suicide or attempted suicide. For example, an Australian study of 2,759 substantiated cases of child sexual assault, with a follow up period of up to 44 years, showed that the rates of suicide and accidental drug overdose were significantly higher among those who experienced child sexual assault compared with age-limited national data for the general population (Cutajar et al., 2010). A school-based survey study with 2,485 South Australian early adolescents also showed that reported experience of sexual assault was associated with suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour (Martin, Bergen, Richardson, Roeger, & Allison, 2004). Interestingly, this research found that the relationship between child sexual assault and suicidality was mediated by the effects of depression, hopelessness and family dysfunction among girls, but that this relationship was still strong among boys even after controlling for these effects. The authors cautioned that boys who have experienced child sexual assault may display suicidal thoughts and behaviour even in the absence of other apparent adverse outcomes (Martin et al., 2004).

Barnes and Josefowitz (2014) discuss the adverse consequences of child sexual assault as being predicted by a complex interplay between the presence of risk and resiliency factors within an individual and their social environments, and the features of the sexual assault itself, including the nature and duration of the childhood experiences. Further research has identified several key factors that are predictive of increased negative impact into adulthood, including a child’s younger age at first experience, greater number of sexual assault episodes, longer duration of the abuse, the presence of coercion, force or threats, more invasive sexual contact, more than one perpetrator, parental mental illness, criminal activity and substance use, and perpetration by a father or father figure (Barnes & Josefowitz, 2014; E. K. Martin & Silverstone, 2013).

Despite the increased risk of later psychopathology among victims of child sexual assault, the experience of serious adverse outcomes is not inevitable. In fact, it has been suggested that up to 40% of survivors of child sexual assault may not experience any negative adverse outcomes at all (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999). A key determinant of positive long-term outcomes appears to be early

disclosure that results in social and emotional support ([Arata, 1998](#); [Fergusson & Mullen, 1999](#); [Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991](#)). Jonzon and Lindblad (2005) suggest that the process of disclosure and the response of those being disclosed to may be even more predictive of the long-term consequences of child sexual assault than the characteristics of the assault experienced. The reaction of the person being told about the assault is critically important, as positive, supportive responses can promote the recovery and future wellbeing of survivors through the reduction of feelings of shame, self-blame and isolation ([Easton, 2014](#)). A child's early disclosure of assault may be particularly beneficial, as it can lead to cessation of the abuse, and also potential prosecution of the perpetrator. Importantly however, disclosure at any stage, whether in childhood or adulthood, can also enable connection with mental health services and may enable treatment or early intervention ([Paine & Hansen, 2002](#); [Sorsoli, Kia-Keating, & Grossman, 2008](#)). It is generally believed that a critical aspect of healing is being able to acknowledge and share the memories, thoughts and feelings associated with child sexual assault ([Harvey et al., 1991](#)).

1.2 Disclosure of Child Sexual Assault

The majority of child sexual assault victims do not disclose their abuse during childhood, with up to 80% not purposefully disclosing before adulthood ([Alaggia, 2005](#); [London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005](#)). An even smaller proportion of cases are ever reported to the police. In a review of 13 retrospective studies with adult survivors, London and colleagues (2008) found that just 5 - 13% of child sexual assault cases were reported to police. London and colleagues' (2005) review of 11 retrospective child sexual assault studies also showed that in many cases, survivors report never having disclosed their abuse prior to their participation in that research study.

Research investigating sex differences in disclosure of child sexual assault has shown that males are less likely than females to disclose and also take longer to do so; with 45% of men and 25% of women taking in excess of 20 years to disclose the abuse ([O'Leary & Barber, 2008](#)). Following a long history of female victim-focused child sexual assault research, more recent studies have specifically examined the experiences of male victims and survivors. These studies have shown a particular sense of shame and stigma among male survivors that leads many to maintain the secret of their abuse well into adulthood ([O'Leary & Barber, 2008](#)). Easton's (2014) study of over 400 male survivors of child sexual assault showed that the number of years until disclosure was negatively associated with mental health, but that the degree of helpfulness of their disclosure was positively associated with wellbeing. Despite the established benefits of supportive disclosure for both men and women, however, research has found that female victims and survivors are generally more likely to receive positive support and reactions from their families, and are also more likely to receive counselling and other professional support than are male victims and survivors ([Foster, Boyd, & O'Leary, 2012](#); [Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997](#); [Stroud, 1999](#); [Ullman & Filipas, 2005](#)).

While disclosure may be thought of as simply "telling someone" about an experience of child sexual assault, the disclosure process is actually considered to be a complex phenomenon which, rather than occurring as a onetime event, unfolds throughout the life of victim and survivor ([Easton, 2013](#)). This may in part reflect the difficulty of the process, which is often found to be hampered by the presence of numerous factors that act to dissuade or prevent child victims and adult survivors from disclosing their experiences. Disclosure is less likely when the perceived disadvantages or risks to disclosure are considered greater than the perceived advantages or benefits ([Cashmore & Shackel, 2014](#)). While

disclosure can lead to a cessation of offending and also enable the victim to receive support, victims and survivors may fear being disbelieved or blamed, and may be plagued by feelings of guilt and shame. Research with young people who experienced child sexual assault has revealed that the most common reasons given for delaying disclosure include the fear of not being believed and feelings of shame and self-blame ([McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014](#)). Other reasons include fear of upsetting family members, and a desire to protect the perpetrator ([McElvaney et al., 2014](#)). This protective response is more likely when there is a close familial relationship between victim and perpetrator, and the closeness of the relationship also impacts on likelihood of disclosure through a victim's fear of family breakdown, and of disrupting relationships with important figures in their lives ([Lyon & Ahern, 2011](#)). Collin-Vezina and colleagues (2015) have recently presented a model of barriers to disclosure of child sexual abuse through an ecological lens, with barriers identified as being "within" (e.g. mechanisms to self-protect), in relation to "others" (e.g. family violence and dysfunction), and in relation to the "social world" (e.g. fears of being labelled).

While these studies show similarities between male and female survivors of child sexual assault, other research has revealed clear gender differences that reflect societal myths and prejudices. For example, Alaggia (2005) found in a qualitative study of disclosure that women were particularly inhibited from disclosure by confusion surrounding guilt and responsibility, and from fears of being blamed or not being believed. Men, meanwhile, were more focused on issues relating to sex and gender; specifically, their fear of being seen as homosexual, of becoming an abuser, and the belief that boys are rarely victims of sexual assault ([Alaggia, 2005](#)). Fergus and Keel (2005) discuss the way in which these gender-based assumptions reflect pervasive social myths; for example, that women and children often lie about rape, and that males should be strong and unemotional, and show no signs of weakness. Also specifically for male victims of male perpetrators, the stereotypical assumptions that surround the concept of masculinity may lead to confusion over sexual identity and concerns with homosexuality, and associated feelings of guilt and shame ([Dorahy & Clearwater, 2012](#); [O'Leary & Barber, 2008](#); [Romano & De Luca, 2001](#)).

While much of the research examining barriers to disclosure has directly asked adult survivors about the factors that prevented their reporting, some studies also examine perpetrators' modus operandi, which provides a unique perspective and insight into the perpetuation of silence in cases of child sexual assault. This research shows the way in which offenders seek to establish special relationships with their victims over time, in order to ensure their trust and compliance ([Queensland Crime Commission and Queensland Police Service, 2000](#)). Through "grooming", perpetrators may progress the child from instances of "innocent" touch through to serious assault, and in this way, child victims may become gradually accustomed to the escalating instances of abuse, and also begin to feel guilty for not telling sooner ([Salter, 1995](#)). This gradual progression and acclimatisation to instances of assault, along with perpetrators' threats to not tell, act as powerful deterrents to disclosure ([Salter, 1995](#)). As victims reach adulthood, survivors may be further deterred from official disclosure by what they learn of criminal justice responses to child sexual assault, including low prosecution rates and negative responses to delayed reporting ([Fergus & Keel, 2005](#)). Adult survivors may also be reluctant to engage in any activity, including the legal process, which requires recollections and descriptions of their experiences or confrontation of the perpetrator, until they feel psychologically "ready" or have appropriate social support ([Mathews, 2003](#)).

Research has therefore provided evidence for the benefits of disclosure, both in childhood and adulthood, providing that survivors receive positive responses to and are able to access support throughout the process of their disclosure. Disclosing about experiences of child sexual assault may

enable access to professional treatment services, and also facilitate healing through acknowledgement and sharing of thoughts and feeling associated with the assault. Despite the importance of disclosure, however, there has historically been a dearth of options available to adult survivors that facilitate their disclosure and provide access to the support necessary for that disclosure. The Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme is one such system that facilitates reporting of historic cases of child sexual assault to police, while enabling access to professional support services.

1.3 The Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme

SADS was developed by Bravehearts as a means to reduce the barriers to disclosure among adult survivors of child sexual assault. SADS currently operates in all jurisdictions across Australia and provides adult survivors with a safe and non-confrontational means of officially reporting historic cases of child sexual assault. SADS does not require a detailed statement or direct police contact, but provides survivors with an anonymous avenue to report their experiences to the police, while being able to receive support from Bravehearts' specialised case management and counselling staff. Adult survivors who make a report through SADS are able to retain control over any possible future contact with police in relation to their information – they are able to elect to have their details forwarded to police and be contacted directly, to have contact directed through Bravehearts, or to request no contact and for their information to be retained by police as intelligence only. In reducing the barriers to disclosure, SADS also aims to increase the number of offences being reported to the authorities, which might otherwise not have come to police attention.

SADS comprises two linked forms that may be submitted through the Bravehearts website. Form A asks for personal details of the person making the disclosure, and is processed and held securely by Bravehearts staff. Form B asks for information on the alleged offender and offence and is forwarded to police. The person making the disclosure is given the choice of sending both Form A and Form B to police. If they choose to send only Form B, the police may in some instances contact Bravehearts to seek contact with that person. Since November 2012, participants have been able to access and submit SADS forms securely online, although hard copy forms are still able to be requested.

In 2008, a preliminary evaluation of SADS was conducted, which focused primarily on users' experiences of the process and associated forms, as well as the perceptions of the benefits and helpfulness of SADS to the communication of their experiences, their feelings of control over their experience, and in contributing to their healing. The 2008 evaluation involved questionnaires completed by 28 participants. The results showed that SADS participants had positive perceptions of the process, including its impact on increasing their communication about their childhood experiences and on their perceptions of police.

1.4 Evaluation Aim

The aim of the current research was to conduct a comprehensive internal evaluation of SADS that builds upon the information obtained in the preliminary 2008 evaluation and that informs improvements to SADS processes, to ultimately provide benefits to adult survivors of child sexual assault.

The specific goals of this evaluation were to:

- Determine the effectiveness of SADS through an examination of:
 - Numbers of SADS reports completed
 - Numbers of SADS reports followed up by police (contact with participant)
 - Number of SADS reports resulting in investigation, statement, charge and conviction
 - Participant self-reported personal outcomes
 - Participant perceptions of SADS against its initial objectives (including: safe means of reporting to police, assists in overcoming barriers to disclosure, support provided to survivors).
- Understand the internal and police-reported processes surrounding implementation and use of SADS, including:
 - Perceptions of and satisfaction with process, including awareness, access and usability
 - Perceptions of and satisfaction with outcomes, including expectations and perceived helpfulness of SADS
 - Perceived comparisons with other means of disclosure (participants)
 - Perceived comparisons with other means of receiving reports (police)
 - Perceptions of and satisfaction with security/anonymity of SADS
 - Police procedures for following up SADS reports
 - Suggestions for improvements to SADS processes.

2. Method

The current evaluation of the Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme incorporated an assessment of both the effectiveness of the scheme, as well as of the processes surrounding its implementation and use.

In order to understand the effectiveness of the scheme, the following outcomes were examined:

- Numbers of SADS reports completed.
- Numbers of SADS reports resulting in police contact.
- Number of SADS reports resulting in investigation, statement, charge and conviction.
- Participant self-reported outcomes.

In order to understand the processes involved in the implementation and use of the scheme, the following were examined:

- Perceptions of and satisfaction with processes, including for example, usability, helpfulness, anonymity.
- Perceptions of and satisfaction with outcomes, including expectations and the extent to which these were achieved.
- Suggestions for improvements to SADS processes.

2.1 Participants

This evaluation focuses on the two key groups that engage with SADS. These groups are:

- SADS participants: Adult survivors of child sexual assault who have submitted SADS forms (or other individuals who have submitted forms on behalf of a survivor of child sexual assault).
- Police: Members of the team within each state police force who are responsible for processing and responding to SADS forms following their receipt from Bravehearts.

2.1.1 SADS participants

For the current evaluation, all SADS participants from the period January 2013 – February 2015 were identified. This period was chosen in order to maximise the potential resulting sample size while enabling sufficient recall of SADS processes from each individual's time of participation.

A total of 230 individuals who had participated in SADS during the period January 2013 – February 2015 were identified. Additionally, in order to again maximise sample size, 14 individuals who had participated in SADS during 2012 and who had provided an email address (most participants in 2012 and prior to this had provided telephone numbers only) were identified, resulting in a contact list of 244 individuals. Current contact details (email address or telephone number) were available for 231 of the 244 participants, and these individuals were invited to take part in the evaluation (the remaining 13 were unable to be contacted for reasons including

disconnected telephone numbers or inaccurate email addresses). A total of 92 survey responses were received.

Each survey only asked questions relating to one offender and the disclosure and related outcomes associated with the offences committed by that person. Participants were invited to complete and submit the survey multiple times to report on multiple offenders. Participants were asked their birth date and gender, and these variables were used to identify multiple responses. Just one participant was found to have submitted multiple responses, and in this case, submitted four surveys corresponding to four different offenders. The 92 responses received therefore came from a total of 89 participants (38.5% response rate).

2.1.2 Police

Police participants were four representatives from three Australian jurisdictions to which the majority of SADS forms are forwarded. These police participants were identified as being responsible for managing SADS processes within their respective police force. Three of the four participants were based within Sex Crimes/Child Abuse units, while the fourth participant was based within an Intelligence unit, and held responsibility for Sex Crimes Intelligence.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 SADS Participants - Survey

A survey was designed for SADS participants incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures. Separate surveys were designed for participants who had taken part in SADS for themselves (i.e. adult survivors of child sexual assault) and for participants who had taken part in SADS on behalf of someone else. The two surveys included the following measures:

- Demographics – gender, background, date of birth (from which an age in years was calculated; following age calculation and identification of multiple responses date of birth was deleted to ensure data was not re-identifiable)
- Offender – relationship to participant, age, gender
- Age at first and last experience of assault
- Years passed from assault to participation in SADS
- Previous disclosures – age at first disclosure, person first told, extent to which felt supported at disclosure, outcomes from disclosure
- Reasons for non-disclosure
- Reasons for SADS participation, likelihood of reporting to police without SADS
- Outcomes hoped for and expected from SADS, extent to which outcomes achieved
- Police contact and outcomes, including perceptions of police belief and support
- Perceptions of SADS processes – usability of forms, understanding of process, satisfaction with support provided and contact received
- Perceived outcomes from SADS participation.

2.2.2 Police – Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed incorporating open ended questions relating to:

- Perceptions of SADS purpose
- Processes undertaken upon receiving SADS forms
- Extent to which action is taken from disclosures received through SADS, and comparisons with other means of receiving reports
- Satisfaction with SADS and perceived benefits
- Perceptions of SADS strengths and weaknesses
- Barriers to widespread and effective use of SADS, and recommended improvements to SADS processes.

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 SADS Participants

Of the 231 SADS participants invited to take part in the evaluation, 210 had a current email address registered with Bravehearts. These 210 participants were emailed an individualised invitation to take part in the evaluation. This email included a link to an information sheet outlining the details of the evaluation, and a link to an anonymous, 15-minute, online survey. The email also indicated an option for participants to contact the researcher if they would prefer a hard copy of the survey be mailed to them. In addition, telephone and email contacts were provided should participants wish to speak to a counsellor or support person.

Consent for the online survey was obtained by asking participants to read the information sheet provided, and clicking a button on the first page of the survey to indicate their acceptance of the invitation to take part. A reminder email was sent approximately two weeks after the first, and a final email thanking participants was sent approximately two weeks after the reminder.

The remaining 21 participants had a current telephone number registered with Bravehearts, and no email address. A researcher telephoned each of these participants. For those participants who did not answer on the first call, a further two attempts were made at times approximately one week apart. No more than three call attempts were made to any one participant.

Upon reaching each contact by telephone, the researcher described the evaluation and asked if the participant would like to take part. If they agreed, the participant was asked whether they would prefer a hard copy or online version of the survey. If a hard copy was preferred, the participant was asked for their current postal address, and was mailed a copy of the survey and information sheet, along with a reply paid envelope for returning it to Bravehearts. Consent to participate was taken by return of the hard copy survey. If an email version was preferred, the participant was asked for their current email address, and was sent an email thanking them for taking part, and including the link to the information sheet and online survey.

2.3.2 Police

Prior to commencement of the police interviews, approval to conduct the research was sought and obtained from the governing research bodies within each police service. The relevant contact within each jurisdiction was then invited to take part in the research, and provided with an information sheet outlining the project. Written informed consent was received from each contact prior to the interview taking place.

For three of the four participants, interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to the contact, and took place either in person or over the phone. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete, and notes were taken by the interviewer throughout the conversation. Immediately following the interview, the researcher typed the notes and emailed these to the participant(s) for confirmation that it represented an accurate portrayal of the discussion, or for amendments to be made by the participant as required. The fourth participant responded to the interview questions in writing and emailed these to the researcher for inclusion.

3. Results

3.1 SADS Participation Data

Since its inception in 2001 and up until February 2015, 559 individuals had submitted forms through SADS.

Prior to analysis of the current survey and interview results, internally collected SADS data was extracted relating to numbers of forms that were received during the period January 2013 - February 2015 and the proportion that, firstly, were sent on to police, secondly, were sent through with the contact details of the survivor, and thirdly, had contact details provided following a police request through Bravehearts. This data is shown in Table 1. Note that this data is only collated and recorded for online forms, therefore the numbers provided do not include hard copy forms that were submitted during this period.

	2013		2014		2015 (Jan-Feb)		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Forms received (online only)	61	-	114	-	16	-	191	-
Forms sent to police	60	98.4	112	98.2	15	93.8	187	97.9
Sent with contact details	22	36.1	46	40.4	8	50.0	76	39.8
Details provided: police request	15	24.6	5	4.4	1	6.3	21	11.0

Table 1. SADS forms received and sent to police, January 2013 - February 2015

3.2 SADS Participant Survey

A total of 92 survey responses were received from 89 participants. One participant was found to have submitted four separate surveys, corresponding to four separate offenders reported through SADS. Each section of these results is therefore either based on a sample size of 89 (participants) or 92 (responses). Section 3.2.1 (demographics) is based on a sample of 89 (participants). Sections 3.2.2 (sexual assault) and 3.2.3 (disclosure) are based on a sample of 92 (responses) as the multiple responses received each referred to a different offender and related offence characteristics, as well as to their associated offences, for which disclosure occurred at different times, to different people, and with different reported outcomes. Sections 3.2.5 – 3.2.7 (police contact, experience with SADS and perceptions of SADS), meanwhile are based on a sample of 89 (participants), as each participant submitted only one set of SADS forms, regardless of the number of offenders reported. Associated police contact, and experiences with SADS forms and outcomes, therefore, reflect just one combined report from each participant.

3.2.1 Demographics

Of the 89 respondents, the majority had taken part in SADS for themselves (n=79; 88.8%), while the remainder had taken part on behalf of someone else, including their child (n=5; 5.6%), another family member (n=3; 3.4%), a partner (n=1; 1.1%), and a student (n=1; 1.1%). The demographics of those who had taken part in SADS for themselves (n=79) are presented in Table 2.

	n	%	M	SD	Min	Max
Gender						
Male	9	11.4				
Female	70	88.6				
Age			42.62	10.02	18	65
Background						
White/Caucasian	73	92.4				
Aboriginal	2	2.5				
Other	1	1.3				
Missing	3	3.8				

Table 2. Demographics (those who had taken part in SADS for themselves; n=79).

The ten participants who had taken part in SADS on behalf of someone else were doing so primarily for female victims (n=7; 70%). The large majority of victims for whom others were reporting were White/Caucasian (n=9; 90%), with a mean age of 31.40 years (SD = 20.51; range = 11 - 69 years).

In six of the ten cases where SADS forms were completed by someone else, the victim was not aware that the process was being undertaken. Reasons given for this included the victim having passed away, the victim being too young, and the victim potentially not having approved due to feelings of shame and desire to keep the assault secret. In the four cases where the victim was aware SADS forms were being completed, these people did not undertake the process themselves for reasons that included being unwilling to take part themselves, being too young, and literacy issues.

3.2.2 Sexual Assault

The large majority of cases reported were of child sexual assault (n=87; 94.6%), while one participant reported a case that met the definition of adult sexual assault (being 18 at the time of the assault). The remainder reported cases of both child and adult sexual assault (n=4; 4.3%).

The most commonly reported offenders were a father (n=17; 18.5%) or family friend (n=16; 17.4%), followed by a step-father or mother's partner (n=14; 15.2%). Other reported offenders included a neighbour (n=8; 8.7%), sibling, including step and half-siblings (n=8; 8.7%), uncle or aunt (n=7; 7.6%), stranger (n=3; 3.3%) and grandfather (n=2; 2.2%). Almost one in five participants (n=17; 18.5%) indicated that the offender's relationship to themselves was one that

was not listed. These included, for example, cousins and other relatives, teachers and instructors, and employers. Only two reported offenders were female (a sister and an aunt).

Table 3 shows the participants' reported ages at first and last offence (note that the victims' reported ages are included in cases of participants reporting on behalf of someone else).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Age at first offence	8.31	3.85	1	18
Age at last offence	12.30	5.69	4	50

Table 3. Mean ages: First and last offence (n=92)

3.2.3 Disclosure

Participants were asked to report the number of years that had passed between the first offence experienced and their participation in SADS. In the majority of cases (n=77; 83.7%), more than 20 years had passed from the time of first offence to participation in SADS. In a further ten cases (10.9%), 10 to less than 20 years had passed, while three participants (3.3%) reported that 5 to less than 10 years had passed and just two (2.2%) reported that 2 to less than 5 years had passed.

Those who were participating in SADS for themselves were asked whether they had disclosed about the sexual assault to anyone else, prior to participating in SADS. Of the 82 cases in which participants were reporting for themselves, 71 (86.6%) indicated that they had disclosed to someone prior to SADS. A further 11 (13.4%) reported that they had not told anyone about the assault prior to reporting through SADS. Details of prior disclosures for all participants (including victims for whom others were reporting) who disclosed prior to SADS participation are provided in Table 4.

	n	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Age first disclosed			19.79	9.92	3	51
Time from first offence to disclosure						
Less than 1 year	9	11.3				
From 1 year to less than 2 years	4	5.0				
From 2 years to less than 5 years	6	7.5				
From 5 years to less than 10 years	20	25.0				
From 10 years to less than 20 years	24	30.0				
20 years or more	16	20.0				
Missing	1	1.3				
Person first told						
Parent or step-parent	30	37.5				
Other family member	13	16.3				
Partner/spouse	15	18.8				
Friend	11	13.8				
Counsellor	5	6.3				
Other	6	7.5				

Table 4. Details of prior disclosure (those who disclosed prior to SADS; n=81)

The large majority of those who had disclosed prior to SADS had told multiple people about the assault. In just three cases (3.6%), participants indicated that they had told no one other than the person they had first disclosed to.

Those participants who were reporting for themselves and who had disclosed prior to SADS ($n=71$) were asked to rate the extent to which they had felt supported following their first disclosure, on a 10-point Likert response scale, where 1 was 'not at all supported' and 10 was 'extremely supported'. The mean rating of support reported was 4.30 ($SD = 3.26$, range = 1 - 10). Independent groups t tests were conducted to determine whether the extent to which people felt supported at the time of disclosure varied according to the length of time taken to first disclose, and the person disclosed to. Those participants reporting for themselves who had disclosed prior to SADS ($n=71$) were split into two groups – those who first disclosed as a child, prior to the age of 18 ($n=33$; 46.5%), and those who first disclosed as an adult, when aged 18 or over ($n=38$; 53.5%). An independent groups t test showed that those who first disclosed in adulthood felt significantly more supported at the time of disclosure ($M = 5.16$) than those who first disclosed in childhood ($M = 3.30$), $t(69) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. Additionally, when split according to whether participants first disclosed to a family member ($n=37$; 52.1%) or to nonfamily ($n=34$; 47.9%), an independent groups t test showed that those who first disclosed to a spouse, friend or other nonfamily felt significantly more supported at the time of disclosure ($M = 5.21$) than those who first disclosed to a parent or other family member ($M = 3.46$), $t(69) = 2.32$, $p < .05$.

All participants who had disclosed prior to SADS ($n=81$) were also asked whether they had experienced any positive or negative outcomes as a result of their disclosure (note that disclosure in this question was not limited to first disclosure, but rather reflected the disclosure process as a whole). Positive outcomes were reported in 55 (67.9%), and negative outcomes were reported in 61 (75.3%) of these cases. Table 5 provides a summary of the primary themes encountered in participants' descriptions of the positive outcomes experienced as a result of their disclosure, while Table 6 provides a summary of the primary themes relating to participants' descriptions of negative outcomes resulting from disclosure.

Theme	Example quotes
Healing (n=24)	<p>"Talking released everything negative and made me no longer a victim, I was a survivor"</p> <p>"Have been able to do lots of psychological work on this issue with psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors etc."</p>
Support (n=15)	<p>"Very beneficial in that I received love and nurturing"</p> <p>"Being able to connect with others who have had similar experiences"</p>
Validation – be heard and believed (n=13)	<p>"Being heard and validated that it should not have happened"</p> <p>"My experienced was acknowledged and the acts were condemned. I was believed"</p>
Relief (n=8)	<p>"Relief - to know that others could hear about my experience and not turn away from me"</p> <p>"Getting it off my chest to someone"</p>
Offender held accountable (n=6)	<p>"Knowing that the person that did this to me would be held accountable"</p> <p>"People who matter know about this man, and what he is about"</p>
Protect others (n=4)	<p>"Have made a secret open and let others know to be aware"</p> <p>"The telling of the details to the police - in the hope he is stopped from any ongoing CSA (child sexual assault)"</p>

Table 5. Summary of primary themes: Positive outcomes resulting from disclosure of sexual assault (including number of mentions)

Theme	Example quotes
Not believed or supported (n=23)	<p>"My father didn't believe me and my mother said that it was normal and to get over it"</p> <p>"Feeling ostracised and alone, generally people feel very uncomfortable and don't want to know about it"</p>
Relationship/ Family breakdown (n=21)	<p>"I have lost every single family member...as they believe it should be left in the past"</p> <p>"Lack of understanding from people I trusted, evolving into losing relationships"</p>
Uncovered negative symptoms/ emotions/ memories (n=14)	<p>"Nightmares and sleep walking as well as insomnia has increased since acknowledging that this happened to me"</p> <p>"Telling other people makes it harder to ignore and pretend that it didn't happen"</p> <p>"Certain people that just blamed me...this had a massive negative impact on me resulting in depression, suicidal thoughts and feelings of despair"</p>
No action taken re offender (n=12)	<p>"Parents are now acting like it didn't happen...they even continue to have contact with my abuser"</p> <p>"Family members no longer have anything to do with me...as they actively support 2 sexual predators to hide their crimes"</p>
Difficult to break silence (n=6)	<p>"He felt embarrassed and ashamed. It opened old wounds"</p> <p>"The breaking of the secrecy like vow that enveloped the family"</p>
Blamed (n=4)	<p>"I had negative responses from certain people that just blamed me when finding out"</p> <p>"Having others think it was all my fault"</p>
Feeling judged (n=3)	<p>"Fear of judgement from people who found out what happened to me"</p> <p>"I have also felt 'marked' by some other people knowing, as that is all they see of me or why I do or don't do things, or behave in a certain way"</p>
Belief best kept in past (n=3)	<p>"Parents are now acting like it didn't happen, it's 'water under the bridge'"</p>

Table 6. Summary of primary themes: Negative outcomes resulting from disclosure of sexual assault (including number of mentions)

3.2.4 Reasons for non-disclosure

Those survey participants who indicated that they had not disclosed about the sexual assault prior to participating in SADS (n=11) were asked questions relating to their reasons for non-disclosure. Specifically, these participants were asked to rate a number of statements reflecting reasons people choose not to disclose, as identified from the research literature, according to the degree to which each was relevant to their decision. Participants rated each statement on a 10-point Likert response scale, where 1 was ‘not at all relevant’ and 10 was ‘extremely relevant’. Eight participants who completed the survey by hard copy also completed these questions, even though this was not required (each had disclosed prior to participating in SADS). Five of these participants’ answers were retained for the current results, as although each of these respondents had disclosed prior to SADS, their disclosure had taken in one case, greater than 20 years; in three cases, from 10 to less than 20 years; and in a fifth case, from 5 to less than 10 years. It was reasoned that these questions would likely apply to those who delayed disclosure as well as those who did not disclose at all. The remaining three of eight reported disclosing within a year of the first offence, and their answers were excluded from the analyses. Figure 1 shows the mean ratings given for each statement relating to reasons for non-disclosure. Please note that the small sample size means that these results should be interpreted with caution.

The lowest overall rated reason for non-disclosure was being afraid that ‘people would think I was gay’. As 13 of the 16 participants responding to these questions were female (all of whom responded with 1, or ‘not at all relevant’, to this item), the responses of the male participants were examined separately. Of the three male participants, one rated this item as 10 (‘extremely relevant’), one rated it as 6, and another rated it as 1, or ‘not at all relevant’. The mean response for this item among the male participants was 5.67.

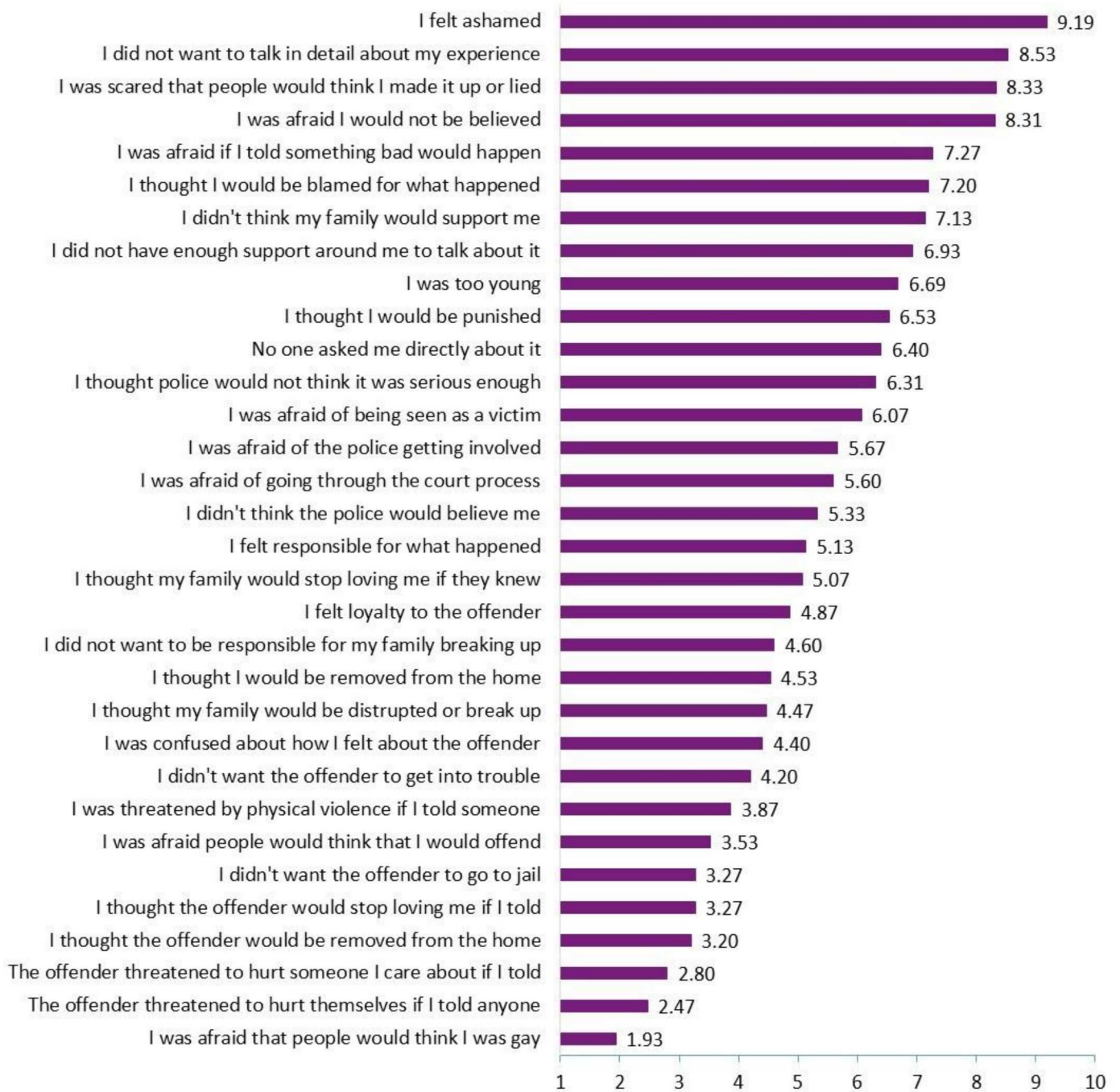


Figure 1. Mean ratings: Reasons for non-disclosure (n=16).

3.2.5 Police contact

Participants were asked about their contact with police following participation in SADS (or in the case of participants reporting on behalf of someone else, the victim's contact with police). Just under one half (n=43, 48.3%) reported having been contacted by police about the report they made through SADS. A further eight participants (9.0%) had contacted police themselves, separately to their participation in SADS, while 38 (42.7%) had not had any contact with police.

In order to determine perceptions of police contact, participants reporting for themselves were asked to rate both the degree to which they had felt believed and supported by police, on two separate 10-point Likert response scales, where 1 was 'not at all believed'/'not at all supported' and 10 was 'completely believed'/'extremely supported'. Additionally, in order to examine changes in perceptions of police belief and support regarding reports of child sexual assault since participating in SADS, these participants were asked to report the degree to which their perceptions of police belief and support had changed since taking part in the SADS process. This item was based on a 7-point Likert response scale, where 1 was 'I have a much more negative perception of belief and support', 7 was 'I have a much more positive perception of police belief and support' and 4 was 'no change'. Table 7 shows the descriptive results of these items, as well as the proportion of all respondents reporting various outcomes relating to contact with police.

	n	%	M	SD	Min	Max
Police belief			8.00	2.72	1	10
Police support			6.29	3.33	1	10
Change in perceptions of police (Note 7-point scale)			4.88	2.09	1	7
Outcomes reported						
Official statement made	23	46.9				
Investigation	19	38.8				
Charges laid	6	12.2				
Court appearance	5	10.2				
Guilty finding	3	6.1				
None of above	22	44.9				

Table 7. Perceptions of and outcomes relating to police involvement (those who had police contact; n=51)

3.2.6 Experience with SADS

Participants were asked how they had first heard of SADS as a means of reporting historic cases of child sexual assault. The most commonly reported means of hearing about SADS was through the Bravehearts website (n=36; 40.4%). The next most frequently reported means were referrals from friends or relatives (n=14; 15.7%) and from other organisations (n=9; 10.1%). Some reported hearing about SADS directly through Bravehearts' staff (n=3; 3.4%) or from a Bravehearts information brochure (n=5; 5.6%), while almost one quarter of participants (n=22; 24.7%) indicated that they had first heard of SADS via other means, including for example, television or newspaper reports, or through social media.

In order to understand the role SADS played in participants' decisions to report to police, participants were asked to indicate their likelihood of ever reporting to police if the SADS process did not exist, on a 10-point Likert response scale where 1 was 'not at all likely to report' and 10 was 'extremely likely to report'. The mean overall response was 3.26 (SD = 2.69, range = 1 – 10). Likelihood of ever reporting to police in the absence of SADS was found to differ according to whether participants had used SADS to report for themselves or on behalf of someone else. Those who were reporting on behalf of someone else indicated a greater likelihood of ever reporting to police if SADS did not exist ($M = 5.40$) than those who were reporting for themselves ($M = 2.99$), $t(87) = -2.77$, $p < .01$.

Qualitative descriptions were obtained of participants' reasons for deciding to report their experiences of child sexual assault through SADS. Participants were asked to identify what it was about the SADS process that led to their decision to report. Table 8 shows the primary themes discussed in participants' reasons for reporting through SADS.

Theme	Example quotes
Availability of support (n=18)	<p>“SADS gave me the ability to feel supported while I reported the abuse”</p> <p>“It was a more gentle approach than contacting the police, there was support from the Braveheart staff. I didn't feel like I was doing it on my own”</p>
Less daunting/Safe means of reporting (n=15)	<p>“The fact that it was mediated through Bravehearts made it seem less daunting than just fronting up to a police station”</p> <p>“The fact I could report it first in a safe environment, my home, helped me to feel empowered to start this hard journey”</p>
Online – don't have to talk face to face (n=14)	<p>“It was online, so I didn't have to say the words and nobody would look at me”</p> <p>“Do it from comfort of home without having to talk to anyone or be pushed for answers”</p>
Easy (n=12)	<p>“It made it much easier than having to walk into a police station and report it”</p> <p>“It was very clean, transparent and simple”</p>
Process of reporting to police taken in steps (n=11)	<p>“It was an option to take control of a situation that impacts my life daily without feeling pressured to take it further until I was ready”</p> <p>“Made the process a step removed from going to the police that I did afterwards and felt prepared and therefore went smoothly and less traumatic”</p>
Be believed/Taken seriously (n=11)	<p>“I had a sense that my experience would be taken seriously by Bravehearts, and that by acting as a facilitator for reporting that is very supportive”</p> <p>“Felt I would be listened to and believed”</p>
Anonymous (n=9)	<p>“The fact you could report it anonymously without having to walk into a police station”</p> <p>“Convenient and immediate and sort of 'private'”</p>
Was unsure how to report (n=8)	<p>“I had no idea how else to disclose this to the police so it took the initial part of the process out of my hands which was good”</p> <p>“Until I contacted Bravehearts I had no idea how to report the assault”</p>
Have offence recorded (n=5)	<p>“A place that kept this information documented”</p> <p>“So that it could be recorded and tracked and that society is aware that this has happened to an innocent member of society”</p>
Trust Bravehearts (n=3)	<p>“Bravehearts are trustworthy and you always hear about the positive things they are doing to help people like myself”</p>

Table 8. Summary of primary themes: Participants' reasons for deciding to report through SADS (including number of mentions).

A number of participants also reported reasons for participation that were not specific to SADS, but related more to their desired outcomes from reporting to police. For example, 13 participants suggested that they reported through SADS in order to protect others from child sexual assault (e.g., *“I wanted to feel like I had done the right thing to prevent this from happening to anyone else”*). A further seven participants described reporting through SADS in order to add to police intelligence about an offender, and potentially add weight to other cases (e.g., *“I felt that it was the next step to take action and to alert the authorities of the perpetrator in case there was another case against his name”*). Additionally, five participants indicated that they reported through SADS in order to make sure the offender was held accountable for their actions (e.g., *“I wanted the perpetrator to have to face up to his actions and whether he denies it or not, feel deep down the guilt of knowing the truth”*).

As well as asking participants to describe their reasons for participating in SADS, the survey allowed participants to specifically indicate the outcomes that they had both hoped for and expected from their reporting through SADS. Table 9 shows the primary themes that emerged from the data relating to the outcomes that participants had hoped for, while Table 10 shows the themes that relate to the outcomes that participants had expected from their involvement with SADS.

Theme	Example quotes
Offender held accountable (n=30)	<p>“That the person that did all those things to me over the years would be made accountable for what he did”</p> <p>“I would like the perpetrator to face consequences”</p>
Add weight to other cases (n=21)	<p>“That should any other person/child have been abused by him over the years, it would show a pattern of behaviour and we could collectively raise awareness with authorities and have him 'watched”</p> <p>“That something may be done about it. If other people have complained about this person then something might get done”</p>
Police action (n=20)	<p>“I hoped and envisioned the police turning up on their doorstep to ask questions”</p> <p>“The police would receive my statement and organise to take things further”</p>
Brought to police attention (n=19)	<p>“I wanted it on his records so that it would be known that he has a history of this behaviour”</p> <p>“I hoped that there's an alert about the offender and that it would not happen to anyone else”</p>
Meet/Talk with support person (n=15)	<p>“I hoped that someone would hear me and provide me with an avenue to seek help, advice and solace”</p> <p>“I thought someone would want to meet me help me to talk about it and work with me on reporting to police”</p>
Protect others (n=15)	<p>“That these sort of people would be found out and charged, put away from society. Not be able to ruin others' whole lives”</p> <p>“Get the offenders name on a list so he can't work with children”</p>
Validation/ Acknowledgement (n=13)	<p>“That people would finally know that I am speaking the truth”</p> <p>“For my experience to be acknowledged”</p>
Closure (n=9)	<p>“Closure that I have finally reported the sexual abuse and not kept it as my secret”</p> <p>“I also hoped that I could be one step closer to clearing my mind in trying to let go of the past”</p>
Feel relief (n=4)	<p>“Getting the info off my chest”</p> <p>“Relief from drug/alcohol abuse, relief from constant anger issues and depression”</p>

Table 9. Summary of primary themes: Outcomes hoped for following participation in SADS (including number of mentions)

Theme	Example quotes
Brought to police attention (n=17)	<p>"I wanted his name to get out and be known, to be monitored"</p> <p>"I felt as if it was on record somewhere that the person named was an offender"</p>
Be contacted (n=14)	<p>"I expected to be contacted to confirm report had been submitted and what support was available"</p> <p>"I expected that the police might contact me for more information"</p>
No expectations (n=13)	<p>"I did not expect anything to happen"</p> <p>"I had no expectations as until that point no one had ever cared"</p>
Meet/Talk with support person (n=11)	<p>"I expected someone to want to meet me and help me"</p> <p>"Advice, information, names of agencies, numbers, explanation of the process, support groups, suggestions, a friendly voice at the other end of the phone"</p>
Police investigation (n=9)	<p>"I expected that an investigation would be carried out to determine if what I recalled happened could be verified in some way"</p> <p>"I at least expected the authorities to investigate, if not to prosecute the offenders...to protect other children from these paedophiles now"</p>
Offender held accountable (n=8)	<p>"That he would be charged and convicted"</p> <p>"There would be other reports about him and get a conviction...justice for my girl"</p>
Healing (n=7)	<p>"Satisfaction that I had my story told and got to move on with my life"</p> <p>"Once acknowledgement and justice has been achieved a sense of healing and closure to begin"</p>
Find out about other victims (n=4)	<p>"To find that the perpetrator had already been on a paedophile list"</p> <p>"That Bravehearts would inform me that someone else had reported the same abuser"</p>
Police take statement (n=4)	<p>"I expected to at least be able to give my statement to the police"</p> <p>"To be contacted by the Police and to make a statement about the incident"</p>

Table 10. Summary of primary themes: Outcomes expected following participation in SADS (including number of mentions)

After describing the outcomes that they had hoped for and expected from reporting through SADS, participants were asked to rate the degree to which those outcomes had been achieved. Two separate 10-point Likert response scales were used (one for outcomes hoped for and the other for outcomes expected), where 1 was ‘not at all achieved’ and 10 was ‘completely achieved’. Table 11 presents the overall means for these items, as well as the means for those who reported at least one police-related outcome resulting from SADS (e.g., official statement, investigation, charges laid) and for those who reported no police-related outcomes. Two separate independent groups *t* tests were conducted, and significant differences were found between those who did and did not report police-related outcomes for both the extent to which outcomes hoped for had been achieved, $t(87) = 5.92, p < .001$, and the extent to which outcomes expected had been achieved, $t(87) = 3.41, p < .01$.

	Police outcome (n=28)		No police outcome (n=61)		All (n=89)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Extent to which outcomes HOPEd for achieved	7.46	2.82	3.62	2.85	4.83	3.35
Extent to which outcomes EXPECTED achieved	6.79	3.14	4.28	3.26	5.07	3.41

Table 11. Mean ratings: Achievement of outcomes hoped for and expected, by experience of police-related outcomes



3.2.7 Perceptions of SADS

Participants were asked to rate a number of statements relating to their perceptions of SADS processes. Ratings were given on a 10-point Likert response scale, where 1 was strongly disagree and 10 was strongly agree. The mean ratings given for these items are presented in Table 12, along with the means for those who reported police-related outcomes and those who reported no police-related outcomes. Independent groups *t* tests revealed significant differences between those who did and did not report police-related outcomes for the statement, “I was happy with the level of contact I received from police following submission of the forms”, $t(70) = 4.62, p < .001$.

	Police outcome (n=28)		No police outcome (n=61)		All (n=94)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The forms were easy to access	8.75	1.94	8.00	2.43	8.24	2.30
The forms were easy to understand	8.82	1.91	8.26	2.34	8.44	2.22
The forms were easy to complete	8.86	1.98	8.05	2.50	8.30	2.37
The process was properly explained	8.46	2.25	7.82	2.75	8.02	2.61
I felt like I understood what would happen with the information I provided	8.18	2.82	7.54	2.69	7.74	2.73
I felt like I understood the process for any contact with Bravehearts	7.96	2.73	7.51	2.85	7.65	2.81
I felt like I understood the process for any contact with police	7.71	2.77	6.67	2.81	7.00	2.82
I was happy with the level of privacy/anonymity afforded by SADS	9.00	1.96	8.08	2.89	8.37	2.66
I was happy with the level of support I received from Bravehearts	7.56	3.23	6.62	3.22	6.93	3.23
I was happy with the level of contact I received from police	7.89	2.69	4.11	3.70	5.53	3.81
SADS was a safe way to report to police	8.93	2.37	7.95	3.11	8.26	2.91
SADS enabled me to report when otherwise might not have	8.54	2.70	8.02	2.81	8.18	2.77
I would recommend SADS to others	8.21	2.89	7.66	3.09	7.83	3.02

Table 12. Mean ratings: Perceptions of SADS processes, by police-related outcomes

Participants who gave a rating of 4 or less for any of the process-related items presented in Table 12 were asked to describe the way(s) in which they thought the processes or SADS forms themselves should be improved. Qualitative responses to this question were received by 34 of the 89 participants (38.2%). The primary themes that emerged relating to SADS process improvements are shown in Table 13.

Theme	Example quotes
Police follow through (n=13)	<p>“The police could send a note to say that they received info and at this point no further action is being taken”</p> <p>“I understand the police don't see Historical Sexual Assault as a priority, and I know they need plenty of information, but the work I have had to provide after 40 years has been crazy. I feel like I keep getting fobbed off, calls are never returned, and I just can't get them to take my official statement”</p>
Bravehearts contact (n=10)	<p>“Trying to contact someone immediately after a form is filled in would be good. Even if to say the process is under way”</p> <p>“I wanted someone to contact me as I have trouble contacting you and trouble talking to you, I wanted someone to actually care and help me”</p>
Clearer information (n=3)	<p>“When doing the forms, I didn't feel clear on what would happen after submission of them (whether the police would be in touch, when that would happen, etc.). Before completing the forms, I also thought that I would need to provide detailed info about my abuse, however when completing them realised I didn't actually have to provide this - if I'd known this beforehand, I probably would have felt more comfortable to do the form earlier”</p>

Table 13. Summary of primary themes: Suggested improvements to SADS processes (including number of mentions)

Personal outcomes relating to participation in SADS were assessed through participants' rating of statements regarding the ways in which SADS may have benefited them. Each statement was rated on a 10-point Likert response scale, where 1 was strongly disagree and 10 was strongly agree. Table 14 shows the mean responses for all participants, as well as the mean responses for those who reported police-related outcomes, and those who reported no police outcomes. A series of independent groups *t* tests showed significant differences between those who did and did not report police-related outcomes for each of the statements; "SADS has helped me to talk more openly about my experiences with my family", $t(76) = 2.20, p < .05$, "SADS has helped me to talk more openly about my experiences with my friends", $t(76) = 2.82, p < .01$, "SADS has helped me to feel confident to speak out", $t(76) = 2.29, p < .05$, "SADS has helped me to take more control over my experiences and response to them", $t(76) = 2.09, p < .05$, "SADS has helped me to heal", $t(76) = 2.93, p < .01$, and "participating in SADS has been a positive experience for me", $t(86) = 2.41, p < .05$.

	Police outcome (n=28)		No police outcome (n=61)		All	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SADS helped me talk more openly with family (self-reporters, n=79)	6.59	3.46	4.86	3.22	5.46	3.38
SADS helped me talk more openly with friends (self-reporters, n=79)	6.63	3.43	4.47	3.11	5.22	3.36
SADS helped me feel confident to speak out (self-reporters, n=79)	6.93	3.19	5.16	3.27	5.77	3.33
SADS helped me talk more openly with victim (reported for other, n=10)	-	-	-	-	4.50	3.47
SADS helped me take control over experiences and response to them (self-reporters, n=79)	7.04	2.99	5.51	3.11	6.04	3.14
SADS helped me to heal (self-reporters, n=79)	7.63	2.76	5.61	2.97	6.31	3.04
Participating in SADS has been a positive experience (n=89)	8.04	3.02	6.27	3.29	6.83	3.30

Table 14. Mean ratings: Personal SADS outcomes, by experience of police-related outcomes

Those participants who provided a rating of 4 or less to the final statement, “participating in SADS has been a positive experience for me” were asked to indicate why SADS had not been a positive experience for them. Qualitative responses to this question were received by 22 of the 89 participants (24.7%). These responses were grouped into themes, and the primary themes that emerged relating to reasons for SADS not being a positive experience are shown in Table 15.

Theme	Example quotes
Lack of contact or advice (n=5)	<p>“No one has bothered to give me advice on what I do now. What do I do to feel ok. What are my next steps. I have no idea. I still feel alone”</p> <p>“I was never contacted....so had no real dealings with SADS when I was going through a very tough time in my life”</p>
Family/relationship breakdown (n=5)	<p>“As soon as I told my family about making the report I have had no contact with parents or siblings as they said it should be left in the past”</p> <p>“If I talk to family about my experiences which I did recently I received 'abuse'; was attacked by my brother and father threatening me and my Mother implying I have done something very wrong and 'ganging up against me”</p>
Lack of police follow through (n=4)	<p>“I feel now that my case has no merit with the police - and given the response I received from my family, I feel completely ignored. As the abuse didn't happen in an institution or a church, it's almost like I don't exist”</p> <p>“Once I decided to take the process further with the police, I have been disappointed by the lack of follow through from their part. I realise that by disclosing so many years later there is such little chance he will ever be held accountable for his actions”</p>
No resolution (n=4)	<p>“Because there has been no resolution and I am still alone in my belief of what happened and there is no one who can confirm that what I am saying is true”</p> <p>“Nothing has happened”</p>

Table 15. Summary of primary themes: Why SADS was not a positive experience (including number of mentions)

As well as being asked why the experience was not positive, these participants were asked to provide comment on what, if anything, they thought could have been done to make the experience of reporting through SADS more positive for them. The primary themes emerging from these responses, relating to suggestions for improving participants' experiences with SADS, are shown in Table 16.

Theme	Example quotes
Police follow through (n=12)	<p>"I should have been given the chance to give a Statement. The police could have followed up better - it has just made me realise my problem isn't a priority and that what he did isn't a big deal"</p> <p>"It's not the fault of Bravehearts - what a great job they do. I feel that some contact from the police (could there be a form letter for this stuff? "Thanks but we don't have time, resources, enough info"??) would have made the experience less open-ended"</p>
Bravehearts contact/ advice/ support (n=10)	<p>"Someone from Bravehearts to contact me after I lodged the form to let me know they got it and go through the process with me"</p> <p>"Perhaps even more follow-up to ensure that we are staying on track and keeping positive. It would be great to know that there is more support out there throughout the process of going to court etc."</p>

Table 16. Summary of primary themes: Suggestions for improving experience with SADS (including number of mentions)

The final survey questions related to the support provided by Bravehearts to participants as they went through the process of disclosing. Participants were firstly asked whether they thought that there was anything further that Bravehearts could have done to support them through the process. Of the 89 respondents, more than one quarter (n=26, 29.5%) said that they thought Bravehearts could have done more, while the remaining participants indicated that they did not think Bravehearts could have done anything further in supporting them through SADS. Suggestions for Bravehearts in further supporting SADS clients were provided by 26 participants, and the primary themes emerging from their responses are provided in Table 17.

Theme	Example quotes
Provide contact, advice and support throughout (n=11)	<p>“More contact to check on how I was coping”</p> <p>“Called and made sure a case manager was assigned to help through the process as I’m going in blind with no support”</p> <p>“A more comprehensive support or counselling throughout the entire journey - even for those of us that seem to be dealing with it well on our own”</p>
Advise form received and next steps (n=9)	<p>“A personal email/some personal contact letting me know that my information had been received, a clear outline of the next step in the process”</p> <p>“Advise police don't always contact”</p> <p>“Someone from Brave hearts to contact me after I lodged the form to let me know they got it and go through the process with me”</p>
Follow up with police (n=5)	<p>“Maybe Bravehearts needs to case manage the police to check that cases are being handled and followed through”</p> <p>“I was a little lost with the police and did not know the process well...It would be good if SADS could receive progress from the police to help follow up”</p>

Table 17. Summary of primary themes: Suggestions for Bravehearts in providing further support (including number of mentions)

Finally, participants were able to provide any further comments if they chose. The large majority of these comments were expressions of gratitude to Bravehearts for the service, however some participants indicated again at this point that they were still waiting for some sort of resolution or wanted further contact regarding their report. The primary themes relating to these further comments are shown in Table 18.

Theme	Example quotes
Expression of gratitude (n=32)	<p>“Thank you for making it possible to disclose to police. Hopefully one day there will be consequences for the perpetrator”</p> <p>“Bravehearts are an amazing organisation, without them I would never have told and I wouldn't have started the healing process”</p> <p>“I feel that this is an extremely valuable program. I feel good to know that at least somewhere there is a record. I don't feel able to do anything more than that, but at least the record is there to collate if he offends again. My hope is that one day anyone who has been assaulted will use this form and in doing so we can better protect our kids. Keep up the good work - so nice to know someone cares”</p>
Waiting resolution/ feeling in limbo (n=5)	<p>“Almost 2 years on, I am curious as to exactly what happened to my report: Did it go in the bin? Is it still on someone's desk? Where exactly did it go to in the (state) Police Department?”</p> <p>“I'm left in limbo, I don't know which way to go, I'd just like to withdraw the whole lot on one hand but want the offenders to know how much of an impact it has been to me”</p>
More contact/ advice/ support (n=4)	<p>“All I wanted was to talk to someone , be advised on what I can do, know I'm not alone on this , help me to talk”</p> <p>“I have no idea if and when the police will be contacting me”</p>

Table 18. Summary of primary themes: Further comments (including number of mentions)

3.3 Police Interviews

The four police participants initially provided comment on what they see as the purpose of SADS. All participants viewed SADS as a means of increasing the freedom and opportunity of victims to report, and of decreasing the barriers to their reporting of cases of sexual abuse. As one participant stated, SADS acts as a “conduit between victims of historical sex crimes and police Australia wide” and “empowers” victims to report offences through a “supportive service”, while protecting their identity if they choose. SADS is also seen as an information gathering process and a source of police intelligence.

3.3.1 Participant involvement in SADS processes

Police participants were involved at various points in the SADS process. In two jurisdictions, participants receive SADS forms directly from Bravehearts and determine appropriate further actions. In one of these cases, an information report is created from the SADS content, and police systems are interrogated to add value to that information prior to disseminating to the appropriate intelligence unit for further assessment and action. In another case, the participant indicated that the action they take depends on whether the victim wishes to make a formal complaint. In the case where a victim has chosen to make a formal complaint and provides their details to police, this information is forwarded on the region where the abuse had occurred. Contact is then made from this region to initiate the investigation process. If the victim does not wish to make a formal complaint and does not provide contact details, the information is entered as intelligence into the state-wide police system. In the case where an offender’s name is observed across multiple reports, an investigation may be launched and contact may be made with Bravehearts to determine if the victim is willing to make a statement at that point. The participant in the third jurisdiction is involved at a later point in the SADS process and does not see the original SADS forms. These are forwarded through a referral unit, who obtain information from various sources and determine the appropriate action and referral for each matter. This participant receives reports from the referral unit and actions investigations as appropriate.

3.3.2 SADS outcomes

Table 19 shows data provided by one participating jurisdiction, including the number of SADS forms received and outcomes achieved, for the period July 2014 – June 2015.

	n	%
Forms received	60	-
Victim contact	40	66.7
Investigation	29	48.3
Arrest	2	3.3
Withdrawal of complaint	5	8.3
Unfounded	2	3.3
Forwarded on (e.g. to other jurisdiction)	4	6.7

Table 19. SADS outcome data, July 2014 – June 2015

3.3.3 Perceptions of SADS

SADS processes were generally viewed favourably by police participants, particularly following changes to the SADS forms that occurred during the conduct of this evaluation, as participant feedback was being received. Prior to these changes, police expressed that there was no clear indication of whether victims wished to make a formal complaint or be contacted by police. This would frequently result in chains of emails between police and Bravehearts' case managers to determine the wishes of the victim and related appropriate police action, resulting in loss of time and sometimes unnecessary extra contact with victims. Police stressed the importance of clarity at the outset on whether a victim wishes to make a formal complaint or to simply provide information to police as intelligence, and believe that changes to the forms requiring victims to note these details have streamlined processes. One participants indicated that it is important to protect the victim and avoid unnecessary contact with multiple police personnel. They stated that it is therefore necessary to gain appropriate and complete information through the SADS forms, to enable direct transmission to the appropriate region and ensure timely follow up. This participant provided two suggestions to further streamline SADS processes:

- Ensure that victims understand the necessary information required by police in order for them to proceed appropriately with the SADS report. The participant suggested that it may be useful to indicate on SADS forms the “required” information without which forms are unable to be processed, including:
 - The specific location where the offences occurred (with as much details as possible including street name and number, and suburb)
 - Detail of the assault (this participant stated that they do not expect victims to put in details they are not comfortable with providing, but as much detailed information as they can provide).
- Ensure that victims are clear upon completing SADS forms on the difference between providing information as intelligence only and making a formal complaint. This participant stated that many victims do not understand the process of making a formal complaint and what this will involve or the information they will need to provide. The participant therefore recommended that there be some provision to allow for this information to be relayed to victims at the time of completing the forms.

3.3.4 Perceived benefits of SADS

Police participants initially stated general benefits of SADS that are relevant to all available schemes promoting notification of abuse, with one participant indicating that “anything that is done over and above to promote notification of child abuse matters is positive”. Participants stated that they understand that victims are not always comfortable approaching police directly, and one indicated that if a victim walks up to a counter at a police station, they may talk initially with a junior uniformed police officer who is not experienced or necessarily trained in dealing with cases of sexual abuse. This participant suggested that this may deter victims at an early stage from going through with a formal complaint. Specifically related to SADS, participants cited the benefits of awareness through Bravehearts' various campaigns of the ability to report historic offences, which may encourage victims to report their own experiences. Avoidance of multiple, unnecessary police contacts was also cited as a benefit achieved through SADS, as upon completing SADS forms, victims are able to be directly referred to the appropriate police region and contact to take their statement. A further perceived benefit was that victims are able to

access a counsellor or case manager at the outset for support, which they don't necessarily have available to them if they walk up to a counter at a police station. This support person may also be able to accompany victims to sessions with police and support them through making a formal statement.

3.3.5 Recommended improvements to SADS

Police participants made several suggestions relating to potential improvements to SADS processes. Several of these suggestions related to the information that is provided to and requested of victims at the point of completing SADS forms, both to fully inform victims of their options and associated processes, and to enable an efficient police response. Relating to the information that is provided to victims, police participants suggested that:

- Victims should be made aware upon completing the SADS forms of the difference between providing their information as intelligence only and making a formal complaint, and the specific processes involved in making a formal complaint, so that they are able to make an informed decision about the options available to them prior to providing their information to police.
- Victims should be made aware that if they do not wish to make a formal complaint and do not provide their contact details, that the police will not investigate and will not contact them, unless it is in the public's interest (e.g. in the case of a serial offender).
- Relating to the information that is requested of victims, police suggested that:
- SADS forms specify the information that is required from victims in order for the forms to be processed, including the precise location of the offences and nature of the assaults.
- SADS forms should be modified to incorporate specific, response- required questions that capture necessary details relating to the location and nature of the offences.
- Police participants also suggested several additional improvements to SADS processes including that:
- Bravehearts may consider sending victims further information to provide additional support following receipt of SADS forms. For example, one police participant suggested that Bravehearts' information on the court process is particularly useful and may be sent to each SADS participant following completion of the forms.
- Consider having one contact person within Bravehearts for all SADS matters. While the current procedure is for Bravehearts' support workers to send through SADS forms received from their clients, and for police to respond to the relevant worker for each case, having one contact person who sends through forms and receives contact from police would streamline processes.
- Media and advertisement campaigns should be used to increase public awareness of the reporting scheme and its benefits.
- Bravehearts should continue to inform law enforcement agencies of its efforts and services in child protection, including schemes such as SADS, to ensure efficiency in response and work undertaken across all agencies.

4. Discussion

This evaluation project aimed to inform improvements to SADS processes, with the ultimate goal of providing benefits to adult survivors of child sexual assault. The specific objectives of this evaluation research were to, a) determine the effectiveness of SADS, and b) understand and evaluate its implementation and use. The results of this evaluation provided particular insight into SADS participants, including into issues surrounding their disclosure of child sexual assault, as well as into SADS effectiveness and implementation processes.

4.1 SADS Participants

The participants in the current survey had all taken part in the Sexual Assault Disclosure Scheme at some point during the period January 2013 - February 2015. All of these participants had therefore taken the step of officially reporting their experiences of child sexual assault to police, although in many cases this had taken some time. The large majority of participants indicated that more than 20 years had passed from the time of their first experience of sexual assault through to their reporting to police through their participation in the scheme. The literature suggests that just 5 - 13% of cases of child sexual assault are ever reported to police ([London et al., 2008](#)), and in many cases reporting is delayed. It is important that survivors are provided with services and systems that encourage and support their reporting of the offences to police.

The large majority of participants in the current evaluation were female, with just 11.4% of survey responses being from males. Similarly, the large majority of survey respondents reported their background as “White/Caucasian”, with 2.5% indicating that they are Aboriginal. The over-representation of females in this sample is not surprising, because although it is difficult to determine differential rates of child sexual assault by gender, studies such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study show a higher proportion of women than men reporting experiences of sexual assault prior to 18 years ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014](#)). The participation rate for males in this survey also closely resembles the rate of males participating in SADS as a whole. Since the beginning of 2013, just 15% of SADS participants have been male. Similar data on background has not been collected for SADS overall; thus it is impossible to determine whether the rate of participation in this survey among Indigenous Australians reflects their participation in SADS overall. Research has shown however that the rate of child sexual assault is higher among Indigenous youth than among other Australian children ([NSW Ombudsman, 2012](#)), although this over-representation is not reflected in the current survey participation rates.

The relatively lower rates of participation among males and Indigenous Australians in this evaluation is not so surprising, perhaps, considering research that has shown lower rates of disclosure and reporting among these groups. For example, research has shown that men are less likely to disclose experiences of child sexual assault than are women and take longer to do so ([O’Leary & Barber, 2008](#)). Additionally, evidence suggests under-reporting of child sexual assault particularly in Indigenous communities ([Stanley, Kovacs, Tomison, & Cripps, 2002](#)). A challenge therefore exists in encouraging male and Indigenous survivors to report their experiences to police, and in promoting SADS to male and Indigenous survivors in particular for this purpose.

The large majority of participants in the current survey were reporting only cases of child sexual assault, although several did indicate occasions of assault that extended beyond childhood and into adulthood. In line with previous research, the reported offenders were most often family members; particularly fathers and father figures. In other cases, the offender was someone known to the family, including family friends and neighbours. Only two of the reported offenders was female, which is not surprising considering that the majority of perpetrators overall, and the large majority of those reported, are male ([McCloskey & Raphael, 2005](#); [Peter, 2009](#)). The average reported ages at first and last offence were 8.31 and 12.30 years respectively, which closely reflects previous research showing that children are most vulnerable to abuse between the ages of 8 and 12 years ([Finkelhor, 1986](#)).

4.2 Disclosure

A primary aim of SADS is to reduce barriers to reporting and to encourage disclosure among adult survivors of child sexual assault. The research literature reveals a large number of reasons for non-disclosure and factors that prevent disclosure among survivors, and a list of these were rated in terms of relevance to the decisions for non-disclosure among current participants. The highest rated reasons for non-disclosure in this study included being ashamed, not wanting to talk in detail about the experience, being scared that people would think they were lying, and being afraid they would not be believed. The primary reasons for non-disclosure in the current study therefore closely align with the most common reasons for delayed or non-disclosure given by survivors in previous research studies ([Mathews, 2003](#); [McElvaney et al., 2014](#)). A limitation of the current study, however, was that the reasons for non-disclosure were asked only of participants who had not told anyone of their experience of child sexual assault prior to participating in SADS. The sample size for these questions was therefore very small, and although in line with previous research, caution should be taken in interpreting the current findings. It is likely that, since many people also delay disclosure, these questions may have been asked of all participants in terms of the reasons for not having disclosed immediately or soon after having experienced the sexual assault in their childhood. It is possible that the pattern of responses may have differed when asked of those who had delayed disclosure (e.g., reasons including being threatened by an offender may have been more pertinent). A possible direction for future research may involve investigation of any subtle differences in motivations for delaying disclosure in childhood but disclosing at some point, and reasons for never disclosing at all about experiences of child sexual assault.

The majority of participants had disclosed about their experience of child sexual assault to a significant other (most frequently a parent or other family member) at some point prior to participating in SADS. Disclosure was delayed, however, in most cases until adulthood, with the average age at first disclosure being just under 20 years. Unfortunately for many, the experience of first disclosure is not always positive. For example, the level of support that participants indicated they had received following their first disclosure was relatively low. This is an important and concerning finding, as research has shown that the level of support received at the time of disclosure is strongly associated with long term psychological and social outcomes (e.g., [Arata, 1998](#); [Fergusson & Mullen, 1999](#); [Harvey et al., 1991](#)). Interestingly, the level of support received differed significantly according to both the time taken to disclose (in childhood or adulthood) and the person disclosed to (family or nonfamily). Those who first disclosed to a spouse, friend, or other nonfamily felt significantly more supported than those who first disclosed to a parent or other family member, and those who first disclosed in adulthood felt more supported than those who first disclosed in childhood.

As Ullman (2002) notes, however, there is an association between timing of disclosure and the person first told, with those first disclosing in childhood being more likely to tell a parent, and those first disclosing as an adult being more likely to tell nonfamily. Roesler and Wind (1994) reported on a study that attempted to separate age at disclosure from the person first told, and found that parents were less supportive than other support sources even when controlling for timing of disclosure. An interesting direction for future research would involve more detailed investigation of the individual, interpersonal and environmental factors that impact on the perceived level of support that is received at the time of disclosure.

In related findings, many participants also reported experiencing negative outcomes as a result of their disclosure, including a lack of belief or support from those disclosed to, relationship and family breakdown, and also negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and mental health. This study has shown that the fears that prevent and delay initial disclosure, including the fears of not being believed or of being blamed, are not necessarily unfounded and in some cases do eventuate, resulting in potentially long-term negative impacts on the survivor themselves.

Despite the lack of support received and the negative outcomes experienced by many, however, the large majority of participants had told multiple people about their experiences of child sexual assault – including family members, friends, partners and counsellors. Perhaps this is because many people also experienced a number of positive outcomes from their disclosure – for many, telling people was important in being able to begin the healing process, in being able to gain a sense of support from others (when this was made available), and in having their experiences heard and validated by significant others.

4.3 Effectiveness of SADS

During the period January 2013 - February 2015, 230 individuals took part in SADS by completing forms either online or in hard copy. Internal data is available for a total of 191 SADS forms that were submitted online during that period. Of those 191 forms, 187 (97.9%) were forwarded on to police as part of the scheme. The remaining four forms were not passed on as part of the scheme for reasons including current child protection concerns (referred on to appropriate agencies) and the report of offences that occurred outside of Australia.

The SADS process allows survivors to either provide their details to police in order to be contacted, or to provide the information of the sexual assault to police as intelligence only and for their contact details to remain with Bravehearts. Internal data from all online SADS forms completed during the period January 2013 - February 2015 has indicated that of the total 191 forms received, 76 (39.8%) were passed on to police with the survivors' contact details. A further 21 (11.0%) survivors' contact details were provided with approval after these details were requested by police. Although this internal data is based only on online SADS submissions, the results of the current survey reflect these findings, in that almost one half (48.3%) of participants reported having been contacted by the police following submission of SADS forms. Police data received from one of the participating jurisdictions, meanwhile, shows that of 60 forms received during the period July 2014 – June 2015, contact was made with 40 (66.6%) victims. Interestingly, a proportion of participants in the current survey reported having contacted police themselves, separately to SADS. The data collected in the survey did not ask for reasons for this direct contact separate to SADS, however, and so conclusions are unable

to be made as to why some people choose to report through SADS and then approach police directly themselves.

The majority of participants who had been in contact with police reported some sort of positive outcome as a result of that contact (e.g., statement, investigation, charges being laid). Several also reported that the offender had been found guilty, which importantly and indicating the success of the program, are convictions that may not have occurred had the opportunity for reporting through SADS not been made available to these survivors. Similarly, police data obtained from one of the participating jurisdictions for the period July 2014 – June 2015 showed that in the majority of cases where victim contact was made (n=40), an investigation was launched (n=27; 67.5%). During this period, police also reported two arrests of alleged offenders based on SADS reports.

Alongside police-related outcomes, participants reported on their own personal outcomes experienced as a result of participation in SADS. Overall, participants were most likely to indicate that SADS had been a positive experience for them, with many also reporting that the process had helped them to heal and to take control over their experiences. Although the survey did not ask what it was about SADS that contributed to these positive outcomes, it is likely that experiencing some sort of resolution, particularly through contact with police and the related outcomes in terms of investigations and in some cases, court appearances and conviction of offenders, contributed to participants' positive experiences with SADS. Not surprisingly and in support of this, the extent to which participants reported positive personal outcomes, including the ability to heal and to take control over their experiences, differed between those who reported at least one police-related outcome and those who reported no police outcomes. Additionally, those who reported police-related outcomes were more likely to say that participating in SADS had been a positive experience than those who reported no police outcomes.

Participation in SADS, as well as associated police-related outcomes, also appears to have impacted on survivors' ability to speak out about their experiences. Again, it is possible that the experience of police belief and support in instigating contact and in many cases, investigations of these cases, may have contributed to participants' increased confidence in speaking out about their experiences with others, including their family and friends. In order to effectively confront a problem such as child sexual assault, it is critical that survivors are able to feel comfortable to disclose about and report the offences against them. It is therefore encouraging that many participants, particularly those who have gone on to experience some sort of outcome resulting from police contact, suggested that SADS helped them feel confident to speak out about their experiences. In breaking down the silence and secrecy that surrounds the issue, it is hoped that other victims and survivors may be encouraged to also report, leading to the identification and potential prosecution of additional offenders.

SADS was developed initially with a number of objectives in mind, including to be a safe means of reporting to police, to reduce the barriers to and encourage reporting among survivors of child sexual assault, and to provide support to survivors as they disclose to police. In examining the effectiveness of SADS, participants were asked to report on the degree to which Bravehearts and SADS was meeting each of these objectives. When asked to rate statements reflecting these objectives, participants strongly endorsed SADS as a safe way of reporting to police, and as enabling them to report when they otherwise might not have. Additionally, when asked their likelihood of ever reporting to police if SADS did not exist, many participants reported that they would have been unlikely to ever report. This was particularly true for those participants who were reporting offences that had occurred against themselves, while being less true of those who were reporting on behalf of

someone else. The safety of SADS, and the fact that it is perceived as a less daunting means of reporting to police, was a commonly reported reason for having used SADS as a means of reporting the offences officially. The safety and anonymity of the scheme may be particularly important for those reporting for themselves; while those who are seeking a means of reporting on behalf of another victim may be more willing to also proceed through other means, including approaching police directly. These findings are encouraging, and suggest that SADS is providing an important means of reporting for these survivors who might otherwise never have officially brought the matter of their own victimisation to the attention of police.

Overall, participants also indicated that they were happy with the level of support provided by Bravehearts following submission of their SADS forms. The availability of support was the most common response provided by participants in describing their reasons for reporting through SADS, with many commenting on the positive support they had received from Bravehearts' staff through the process of reporting. Despite this, however, in some instances people indicated that they felt Bravehearts could have done more to support them in their disclosure. In analysing participant responses, it became clear that a subset of participants did not receive the level of contact and support that they had expected from either Bravehearts or the police following submission of the SADS forms. In such cases, participants indicated that they had provided their information but had not been kept informed as to what was happening with it, or if and when the information was to be acted upon. Therefore, although in many cases SADS appears to be meeting its initial objectives, there is opportunity to improve upon the level of contact and support provided to participants, and to ensure the consistency of contact and support provided to all participants, following submission of SADS forms.

Overall, the results of this evaluation indicate that SADS is effective, with many participants choosing to report through this means when otherwise they might never have reported the offences against them officially. A number of positive outcomes have also been achieved from these SADS reports, including current police investigations and several arrests and convictions. That these outcomes may never have occurred without this means of reporting points to the effectiveness of the scheme. Additionally, participants have reported a number of positive personal outcomes, including the ability to heal, to take control over their experiences, and to speak out about their experiences to others. Each of these outcomes is a step toward breaking the silence and secrecy surrounding child sexual assault. The current findings also suggest that SADS is meeting a number of its initial objectives, although there may be scope to formalise the level of support that is provided to, and the procedures surrounding contact with, all SADS participants.

4.4 SADS Processes: Implementation and Use

SADS processes were generally viewed favourably by police participants, and these participants commented on a number of benefits provided by SADS for both police (including increased intelligence and notifications of child sexual assault matters), and for victims (including reduced barriers to reporting and provision of support). One clear finding that emerged from the police interviews was the importance of clarity in the information that is both conveyed to SADS participants and received from these same participants, in order to be able to proceed with the report while avoiding unnecessary and inefficient extra contact with the victim and with Bravehearts. During the conduct of this evaluation, several changes were made to the SADS forms that enabled greater

clarity as to the victims' wishes regarding contact with police, and police participants expressed that these changes had increased their efficiency in responding to SADS reports. Several recommendations for further changes were still made, however, and these are discussed further in section 5.

An important aspect of this process evaluation was the examination of participants' perceptions of and satisfaction with SADS, including awareness, accessibility and usability of the scheme, as well as perceived comparisons with other means of reporting. The results of the survey showed that participants primarily became aware of SADS through the Bravehearts' website. While word of mouth was also a means of referral to SADS, including through friends and family and other organisations, many participants indicated that they had heard of SADS through various other means, including the television, newspaper and social media. It is therefore important that Bravehearts continues to make use of various forms of media, including its website and social media pages, to ensure that the scheme is further promoted to survivors as a safe and supportive means of officially reporting their experiences of child sexual assault to police. As one police participant also commented, there is scope to use media and advertisement campaigns to increase public awareness of the scheme and its benefits.

Perceptions of SADS processes, including the usability of the forms themselves, were assessed through a number of rating scale items, which showed that overall, participants found the process and associated forms to be clear and easily accessible and completed. Importantly, participants indicated that they were happy with the level of privacy and anonymity that was afforded by SADS. This was reiterated in qualitative statements regarding the reasons that participants chose to report through SADS – a commonly reported reason was the anonymity of the scheme, and the fact that survivors could provide the information online without being required to talk with a person face to face at that stage. As the current research has shown, a primary reason for non-disclosure of child sexual assault is not wanting to talk in detail about the offence, and participants reported that not having to verbally describe their experiences in detail at the outset was an important reason for choosing to report through SADS. It is important that a safe, anonymous process such as SADS is provided for survivors in order to break down the barriers to reporting and encourage disclosure to police of historic cases of child sexual assault.

Participants' overall positive perceptions of SADS were also evident through many of the additional reasons given for having chosen to report through the scheme. As well as mentioning the availability of support, safety and the anonymity/online nature of the scheme, participants also indicated that the process was an easy means of reporting, potentially requiring less from them than other means of reporting, such as directly at a police station. Police participants also recognised the disadvantages of reporting directly to police at a station, and indicated that SADS allows victims to avoid multiple, unnecessary points of contact with police and instead enables victims to be directly referred to the appropriate police region and contact to take their statement. Additionally, a number of participants appreciated that the process of reporting through SADS is able to be taken in steps – that they could “take control” of the situation by firstly reporting the offence to police anonymously and from that point, take the time to make additional decisions about potentially having contact with police and acting upon the matter further. Interestingly, a number of participants also suggested that until they became aware of SADS, they were unsure how else to report their experiences to police. Further investigation of the qualitative data suggested that some participants were unsure about the extent to which police were interested in or would act upon reports of historic cases of child sexual assault, and relatedly, were unsure how to report such matters. The availability of a scheme specifically targeted toward adult survivors of child sexual assault was important for these people in providing the means

for them to report, and in encouraging them to feel that their experience would be believed and taken seriously.

Participants largely indicated in their ratings of SADS processes that they felt the procedure was properly explained, that they understood the process for contact and that they understood what would happen with the information that they provided through SADS. Despite this, however, analysis of the qualitative data suggested the existence of a subset of participants who were dissatisfied with the level of contact received from either Bravehearts or the police. Although we are unable to match individual surveys with internal data relating to the provision of contact details to police, we do know that of the online forms submitted during the period January 2013 - February 2015, just 39.8% were forwarded to police with contact details included. In a further 11% of cases, police requested contact details following receipt of the anonymous forms. It is unclear whether the remaining participants assumed some sort of police contact despite not having allowed for their contact details to be passed on to police. Alternatively, participants who did provide their contact details to police may not have received the level of contact that they had expected. In providing suggestions for improving SADS processes, respondents most frequently recommended that police provide some sort of follow up contact with participants following their report. Additionally, a number of participants suggested that Bravehearts' contact procedures should be improved, and further, those participants who suggested that SADS had not been a positive experience for them most commonly indicated that this was due to a lack or low level of contact, advice or support provided by Bravehearts. In conjunction with the qualitative data relating to Bravehearts' potential to improve the level of support provided to SADS clients (as discussed in Section 4.3), these results clearly indicate that there is scope for Bravehearts to formalise the contact procedures for participants following receipt of SADS forms, and to ensure that each participant receives the level of contact and support that they expect and desire from the process. Police participants also suggested that additional support may be provided to victims following the point of initial contact, through provision of written information, such as Bravehearts' information on the criminal justice system process.

An additional aspect of the process evaluation involved understanding participants' perceptions of and satisfaction with SADS outcomes. This entailed firstly an investigation of the outcomes that participants both hoped for and expected from the process of reporting through SADS. The outcomes that participants hoped for primarily related to obtaining justice, with the police taking some sort of action and the offender being held accountable for the crimes committed. A common theme was also the hope that their report would add weight to other cases reporting the same offender. A number of participants expected that the perpetrator would have offended against multiple victims and hoped that others would also have reported that person, which they believed would make it more likely to achieve justice. The outcomes that were expected differed somewhat, and most commonly involved simply bringing the matter to police attention; to have it recorded that this person had committed a crime and potentially for that offender to be monitored. Many also reported that they had expected to be contacted following the submission of SADS forms; by Bravehearts, the police, or both. A number of those who expected contact were those who then went on to say that they had not received the level of contact and support they had hoped for. A further subset of participants indicated that they had no expectations regarding their involvement in the process, or even that they expected nothing to happen as a result of their participation in SADS.

The current results also showed that not surprisingly, those who reported contact with police and associated police-related outcomes were more likely than those who reported no police outcomes to say that both their hopes and expectations had been achieved. Those reporting no police-related

outcomes were meanwhile significantly less likely to indicate that participating in SADS had been a positive experience for them, and several of these participants suggested that this was due to a lack of police action or the fact that there had been no resolution in regards to the matter they had reported. Some others who reported that their participation in SADS had not been positive also experienced negative outcomes including relationship or family breakdown as a result of their official reporting of the offence. Unfortunately for several people, taking action in response to their experiences had provoked negative family reactions that had adverse consequences for the participant involved.

A primary reason for delayed or non-disclosure among survivors of child sexual assault is the fear of not being believed (McElvaney et al., 2014). Additionally, the literature shows that adult survivors may be deterred from official reporting of child sexual assault due to their perceptions of the criminal justice responses to such cases, which can include negative responses to reporting of historic cases (Fergus & Keel, 2005). It is therefore important to address survivors' potentially negative perceptions of police belief and support in order to encourage official reporting of historic cases of child sexual assault. Those participants who had been in contact with police indicated that, overall, they had felt believed and, to a slightly lesser degree, supported by police. When asked to consider whether their perceptions of police had changed following their participation in SADS, those who had been in contact with police reported that, overall, their perceptions of police belief and support were slightly more positive after taking part in the scheme.

Overall, participants indicated that they would recommend SADS to others survivors of child sexual assault as a means of reporting to police. Additionally, many indicated their support of SADS or expressions of gratitude when asked if they would like to make further comments at the conclusion of the survey, showing participants' largely positive perceptions of the scheme. While several participants used this opportunity to again indicate that they felt there had been no resolution of their case and that they would have liked further contact, support or advice, the large majority suggested that SADS is a valuable process that enabled the disclosure of their experiences to police.

4.5 Limitations

This evaluation has several limitations that require acknowledgement. The current response rate of 38.5% of SADS participants is reasonable, however just 92 surveys were returned from 89 respondents. Although the qualitative data collected contained rich descriptions that enabled in depth understanding of the perceived effectiveness of and processes surrounding the scheme, the quantitative results based upon this relatively small sample of volunteer participants are limited in terms of their potential generalisability to the wider population of SADS users, including those who did not choose to take part in the evaluation. As the number of male respondents was also low, we were unable to conduct gender analyses and therefore were unable to draw conclusions as to the differential perceptions and outcomes occurring between male and female users of SADS. This evaluation also only included those who had participated in SADS during the period January 2013 - February 2015 (with several participants from 2012 for whom email addresses were able to be identified also included). While this limitation was necessary in order for participants to be able to more accurately recall their participation in SADS and the processes surrounding this, this both reduced the sample size obtained and potentially impacted upon the outcomes that were able to be reported. It is likely that many of these participants had not yet been able to experience any police-related or personal outcomes due to their recent participation in the scheme.

In order to more accurately understand the effectiveness of SADS, a pre and post survey design method would have been preferential to the current cross-sectional retrospective design. There is scope to invite participation of SADS clients in a baseline survey at the time of submitting SADS forms, with follow up data collection to be conducted at pre-determined periods. The number of SADS forms submitted per year is not currently high enough however to have enabled timely collection of data for the present evaluation. The inclusion of a baseline survey at the time of SADS participation is a possibility that will be considered for future SADS participants and for future evaluation planning. The current evaluation, however, is limited by the cross-sectional, retrospective design, and interpretation of data particularly relating to participants' perceived outcomes and changes in their perceptions needs to be considered in light of this limitation.

The police data obtained is also limited in that, while SADS is a national scheme, police participants from just three jurisdictions were interviewed. The large majority of SADS reports received by Bravehearts are forwarded on to these three jurisdictions, and therefore it is likely that these participants were able to provide the greatest degree of insight into SADS processes. It is also possible, however, that a unique perspective of the scheme, including opportunities for its expansion, may have been able to have been obtained from police in those jurisdictions that receive fewer SADS reports.

The police participants in this evaluation were also found to be involved at various points in the SADS process. Several participants received SADS forms directly from Bravehearts, and determined the appropriate action for these reports. Another participant, meanwhile, was involved at a later point in the process, and receives reports that are processed through a referral unit. While the current data has provided an invaluable and broad insight into police processes and perceptions relating to SADS, the recruitment and interview of more participants at each stage in the process within each jurisdiction may have enabled a more in depth insight into specific police processes relating to SADS.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of this evaluation:

1. Formalise contact procedures for all SADS participants

The current evaluation data suggests that the formalisation of contact procedures following participants' submission of SADS forms is a priority. It is recommended that all participants who submit a new SADS form to Bravehearts be contacted by telephone within three working days, to firstly confirm that their forms have been received and to secondly clarify SADS processes as per Recommendation 2.

2. Clarify SADS processes upon contact with participants

Related to the formalisation of contact procedures, clarification of SADS processes is required at the point of Bravehearts' initial contact with each participant. Alongside the written information provided with the forms, it is recommended that all participants be informed verbally of their options for contact with police. It should be made clear to participants that they are able to either:

- Provide contact details to police in order to be contacted and make a formal complaint, or
- Provide the information regarding to police as intelligence only (contact details retained by Bravehearts).

Further information should also be provided in order for each participant to make an informed choice. In the case of providing contact details, participants should be informed about the specific processes involved in making a formal complaint. In the case of providing information as intelligence only, participants should be made aware that they will likely not be contacted by police. It is also recommended that all participants are informed that they are able to contact police themselves at any stage, and that Bravehearts is able to provide support in their contact with police if desired.

3. Modify SADS forms to elicit all information required by police

In order for police to efficiently respond to and refer reports to the appropriate region, accurate and detailed information should be captured in the SADS forms. Specifically, police require information about the precise location of offences and the nature of the assaults and whether the alleged sexual assault was perpetrated against a child or an adult. It is recommended that the SADS forms specify the information that is required from participants in order for the forms to be processed, and that the electronic forms be modified to require this specific information prior to submission.

4. Streamline internal Bravehearts SADS processes

Police participant responses suggested that the efficiency of SADS processes may be improved by having one contact person within Bravehearts for all SADS matters. This person should be responsible for contacting all SADS participants as per Recommendations 1 and 2, and for sending through all forms and receiving contact from each jurisdiction.

5. Consider use of baseline survey at time of SADS participation for ongoing pre and post evaluation

The current evaluation was limited by its cross-sectional, retrospective design. Future evaluations of SADS would benefit from a pre and post survey design method. To enable this, the implementation of a short, de-identified (participants will generate their own linking code) baseline survey at the time of SADS participation should be considered, with follow up data collection to occur at pre-determined periods.

6. Promote use of SADS through media, and particularly among males and Indigenous Australians

Media and advertisement campaigns should be used to increase public awareness of the reporting scheme and its benefits. Additionally, in order to address the reduced rate of disclosure and reporting among males and Indigenous Australians, it is evident that all survivors of child sexual assault should be made to feel comfortable and supported in breaking the silence around their abuse. Male survivors of child sexual assault may be encouraged by the anonymity of SADS; however a challenge exists both in promoting this scheme to male survivors and encouraging them to make use of the service to report their experiences of child sexual assault. Similar challenges exist for Indigenous Australians. Further research may be required to investigate the challenges that exist in promoting this scheme and encouraging its use among both male and Indigenous survivors, in order to increase adoption of SADS among these groups.

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