

# SATU ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Dr Maeve Eogan and Colleagues

from all 6 SATU sites

May 2021



This summary was developed with on-site SATU clinical staff. Sincere thanks also to all forensic examiners who contribute to the on-call rota, and to all affiliated administrative and support staff.

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## Introduction

The six Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs) in Ireland provide clinical, forensic and supportive care for those who have experienced sexual violence. These units are located in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Mullingar, Galway and Letterkenny and, in 2020, these units provided care for 734 people who disclosed rape or sexual assault. An additional 24 people were cared for in the out-of-hours service at University Hospital Limerick, which has a slightly different structure and funding stream.

### **'Covid effect'**

Nobody needs any reminding that 2020 'was a year like no other'! January and February ran as normal, albeit with a 6% increase in attendances compared with 2019. Everything changed in March 2020, and we really did not know what to expect. We were concerned that staff would be redeployed or become unwell and units would be closed, but thankfully that did not happen, and all SATUs remained operational throughout the year – exceeding the KPI with over 90% of people being seen within 3 hours of a request for forensic examination, when appropriate.

While there was a 22% reduction in attendances compared with 2019, it is significant to note that sexual violence unfortunately did not disappear. We have summarised some of the salient metrics, what is most notable is that there was a sustained demand for the service throughout the year. Assailants known to the person increased, while assaults by strangers and recent acquaintances reduced. All age groups continued to be represented, but a reduced number of attendances by third level students was noted. These metrics confirm the multifactorial nature of sexual violence, with prevention undoubtedly requiring a 'whole of society' approach.

The SATU team deserves to be commended on its ability to pivot rapidly, and adapt to the changed circumstances. Very quickly we introduced questionnaire-based screening prior to any attendance at SATU, with referral for COVID testing if indicated. Face-to-face contact with patients was reduced (initially by using telephone for consultation/history taking and then moving to videocall when appropriate equipment was obtained), appropriate PPE was used and footfall in SATU was reduced (e.g number of accompanying people and staff in training were reduced). We acknowledge the support of the HSE in funding 2 iPads for each unit to facilitate video consultation and to limit the duration of in person contact, to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission. These iPads also facilitated easy access to patient feedback platform, which is so helpful in gaining service user perspectives.

An unfortunate casualty of the restrictions was the ability to offer onsite, face-to-face psychological support at the time of SATU attendance. While phone contact was offered, and information regarding accessing crisis counselling from Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) after attendance was provided – we look forward to welcoming back our RCC volunteers who are an essential part of the sexual assault response team.

## **SATU Updates**

With ongoing implementation of the Department of Health SATU Policy Review, significant communications initiatives were developed and launched – these included improvements to SATU portion of HSE.ie website and improvements to SATU patient information. A website based animation (<https://www2.hse.ie/services/sexual-assault-treatment-units/sexual-assault-treatment-units.html>) describing the various elements of SATU care has received really positive feedback and we look forward to ongoing collaboration with the HSE communications team to optimise this platform. We also welcomed Ann Donovan to the SATU Network as National Staffing and Operations manager, this role was somewhat limited by redeployment and the limitations placed on face to face meetings which precluded site visits – but we look forward to reaping the benefits of this role in 2021.

The Donegal SATU moved to a purpose built SATU this year. Covid related restrictions have meant that we have only had ‘virtual guided tours’ but an update on their journey to date, with some photos of the new facility is included in this document.

As a community of practitioners working in the SATU, we reaped some benefits from the new communication and learning vistas that the pandemic brought. We got used to having regular team and peer review meetings on Zoom, and also to delivering and accessing Zoom webinars on a whole range of topics. Many thanks to Sarah O’Connor for her commitment to coordinating a comprehensive professional development programme for the SATU services, and we look forward to many more excellent learning opportunities in this context.

## **Annual Study Day**

This year’s (12th annual) interagency study day for those involved in SATU care provision took place in October 2020, we used an interactive webinar format for the first time. Sarah O’Connor, Nessa Gill and Catherine Marsh excelled as organisers and coordinators of this endeavour, which had over 500 attendees from Ireland and elsewhere. Speakers and presentations were varied, including Professor Tom O’Malley who gave an update on the Department of Justice review of investigation and prosecution of sexual offences. Diane Faugno a Past President of the Academy of Forensic Nursing spoke on Domestic Violence and Non-Fatal Strangulation and Dr Lorna Flanagan from Forensic Science Ireland presented a research paper. Helen McGrath from the Central Statistics Office also provided an update on the Sexual Violence Survey. While the webinar based format was excellent for information sharing we certainly missed our traditional opportunities for interagency networking. While we hope to maintain some webinar element for the 2021 meeting, to facilitate access, it would also be great to be in a position to reintroduce some in-person attendance. We are delighted that a ringfenced budget for this event is now included in the annual SATU budget.

## Thanks and Acknowledgments

Working in a SATU is never an 'easy option', and I thank all members of each SATU team, particularly this year with Covid-19 impacting on every aspect of our work and home lives. This report of key service activity is only possible because of the commitment to collation and inputting of relevant data into the database to ensure accurate presentation of service activities and key performance indicators. This year, the anonymised data on 93% of attendances were inputted within 10 days of the first visit, ensuring availability of accurate data promptly. Thanks again to Connie McGilloway, ANP in the Donegal SATU, who has been the clinical lead on the database project from its inception and continues to provide a clinical interface between the SATUs and the project team to ensure that IT problems & challenges are identified and resolved promptly. Also thanks to a subgroup of CNS (SAFE) colleagues from each of the SATUs who worked on comparison data to assess the impact of the pandemic on SATU metrics and to the Rotunda research department who have provided additional support in collating & presenting this report.

I would also like to thank a number of key personnel within the Health Service Executive, including Killian McGrane and Davinia O'Donnell (NWIHP). Their commitment to SATU services despite multiple (mainly Covid related this year!) demands on their time and resources is greatly appreciated. I acknowledge the support we receive from Masters, Clinical Directors, Directors of Midwifery/Nursing and hospital & network managers who advocate for us despite frequent, competing and important demands on their valuable resources.

As always, it is important to acknowledge the men and women who attend SATUs around the country. Nobody ever 'wants' to attend a SATU and we never cease to be amazed by the strength that our service users display, despite significance of the events they have experienced. We really value the feedback provided, in order to critically appraise our service through the lens of a service user, and we have streamlined that feedback mechanism in 2020. This underpins continuous quality improvement, and is really valuable in informing ongoing staffing and infrastructural developments.

Please contact me directly, or via [satu@rotunda.ie](mailto:satu@rotunda.ie), if you have any questions or comments on this Executive Summary of Key Service Activity.



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Key Service Activity in  
**Sexual Assault Treatment Unit**  
2020

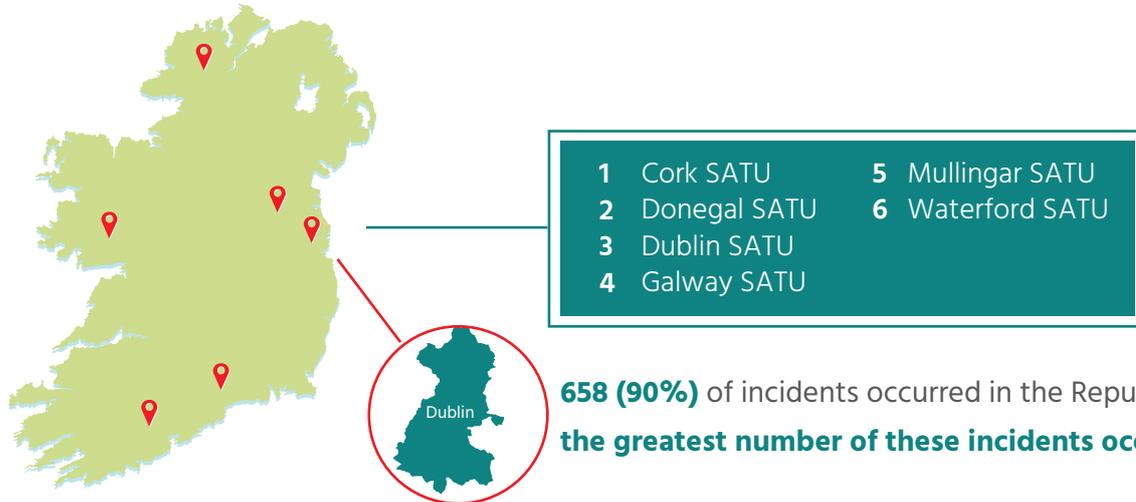


## Attendance in Each SATU 2020

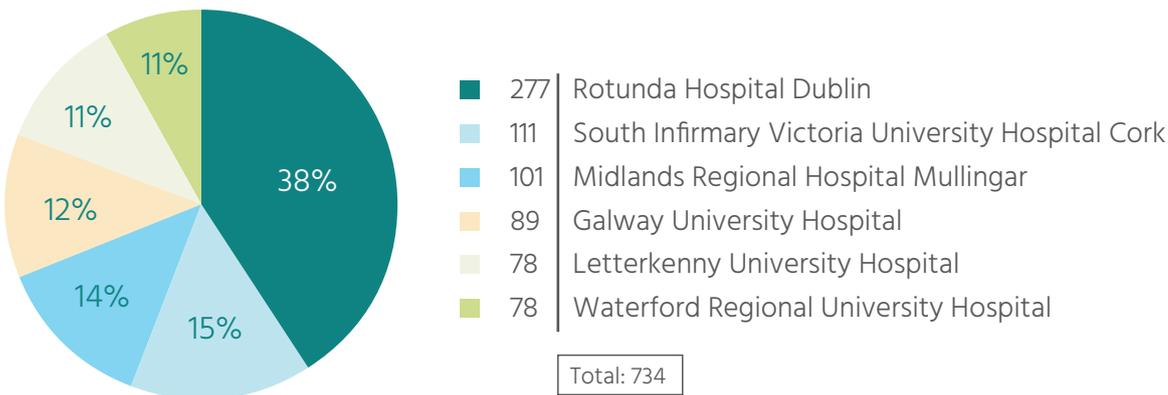
### Opening Remarks

There were **734 patients** at the **6 SATUs in the Republic of Ireland in 2020**, a decrease of 209 from **2019** (when **943 patients** attended). This is a 22% decrease.

### SATU Locations 2020



**658 (90%)** of incidents occurred in the Republic of Ireland with **the greatest number of these incidents occurring in Dublin (26%)**.



**50% (or 351) of patients met with a Psychological Support Worker at the first SATU visit (n=702)**

**93% of patients were seen by a Forensic Clinical Examiner within 3 hours of a request for Forensic Clinical Examination (n=409)**

## Time and Day of Attendance

AUG/SEP 2020						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

SUN MON **TUE** WED THUR FRI SAT

**Tuesday** was the busiest day of the week and **August/September** were equally the busiest months.



While the majority of the patients were seen between 8am and 8pm, **26% attended at night which underpins the importance for round the clock service.**

## Details of Incident



**549 (75%)** of patients attended for SATU care **within 7 days** of the incident.



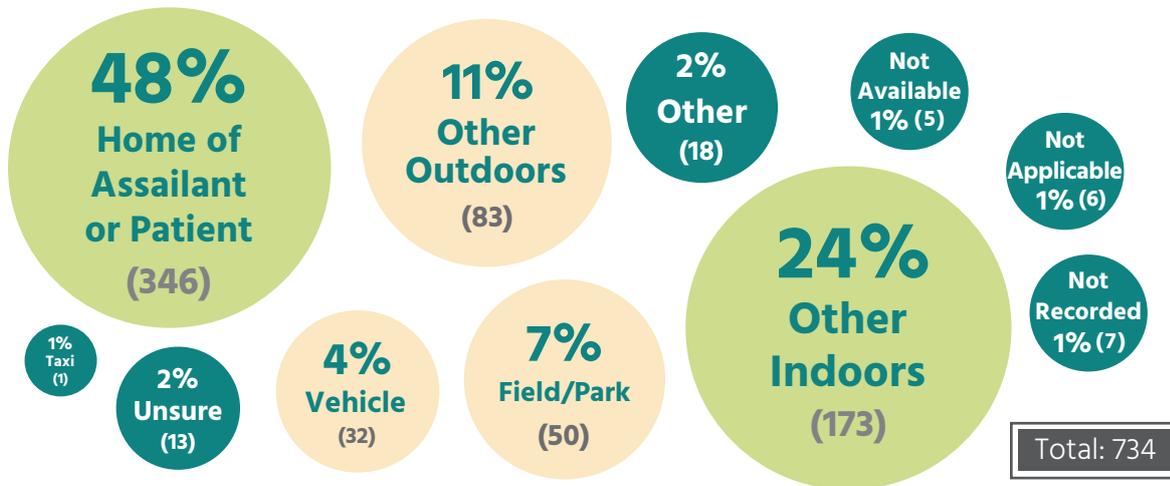
**91%** of assaults were by a **single assailant**, with **9%** committed by **multiple assailants**.



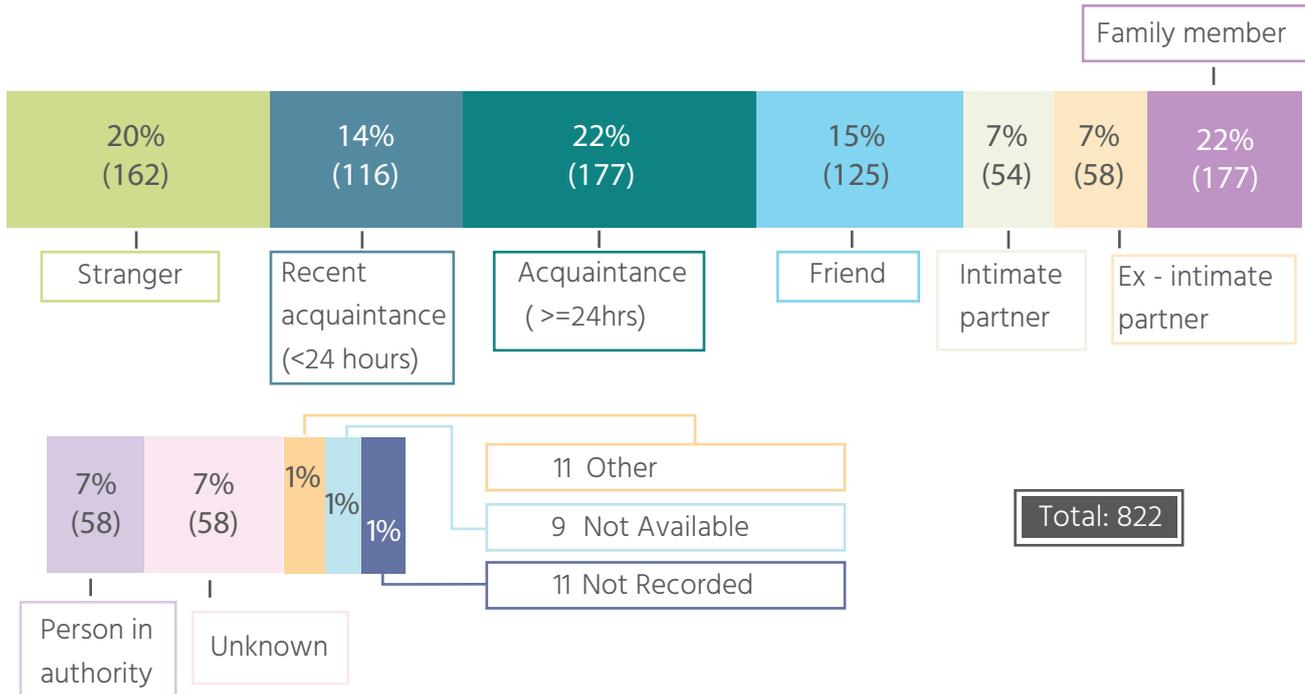
Out of **734** reported incidents, **71%** occurred **indoors** with **24%** being in the **assailant's home** and **24%** being in the **patient's home**.

**178 (22%)** of **822 perpetrators** were described as a **'stranger'** or **'recent acquaintance'**, **142 (17%)** as a **'friend'** or **'acquaintance'**. **122 (14%)** were described as an **intimate (or ex-intimate) partner**, up from **9% last year**.

### Location of Incident



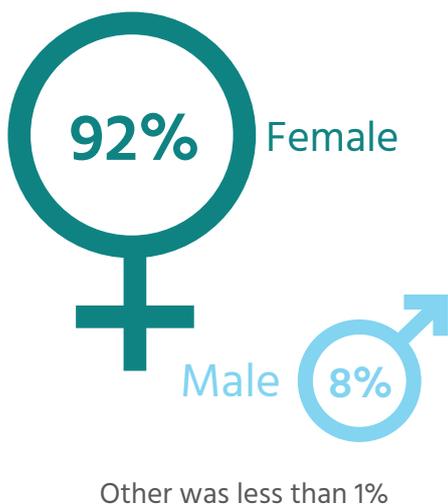
### Assailant's details i.e. relationship to victim



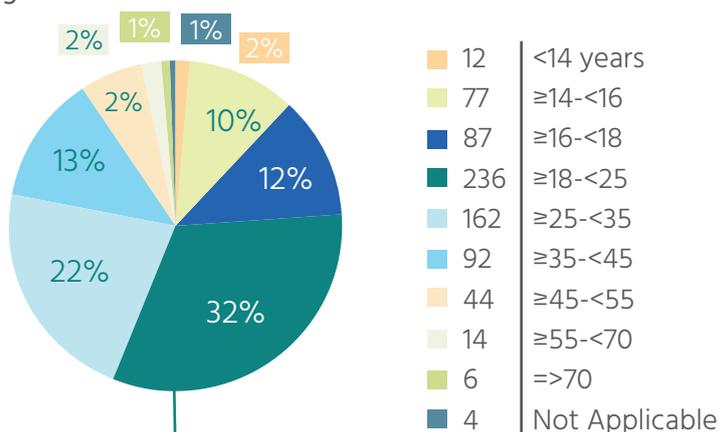
**95 (13%)** were unsure if sexual assault had occurred.

## Gender, Age, Nationality, Referral Source

### Gender



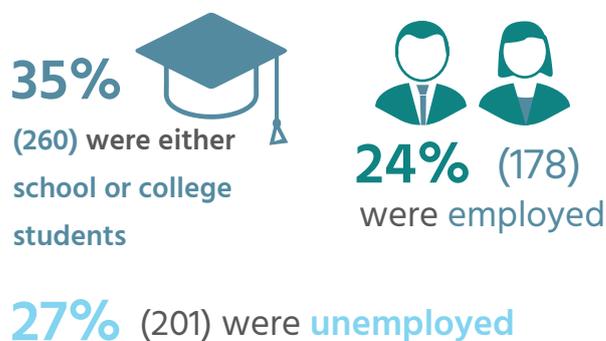
### Age



The mean age was 27 years

The age of people attending <14 years (12 people) to over 70 (6 people)

### Nationality



### Referral Source



## Patients Reporting the Incident to An Garda Síochána / Interval from Incident till SATU



- 483 (66%) patients reported the incident to An Garda Síochána.
- The majority reported to the SATU within 3 days of the incident. 285 (39%) of patients reported the incident within 24 hours and 167 (23%) reported the assault between 24-72 hours.



- 74 patients opted to securely store their forensic evidence in SATU to give them an option to report the incident and have this forensic evidence released.

## Alcohol and Drug Use



285 (39%) had consumed more than 6 standard drinks



153 (21%) had consumed 6 or less standard drinks

254 (35%) had consumed no alcohol, in the 24 hours prior to the incident.



When recorded, 562 (77%) had not taken any drugs, 105 (14%) had taken recreational drugs and 14 (2%) had taken both recreational and prescription drugs, in the 24 hours prior to the incident.

125 (17%) were concerned that drugs (including alcohol) had been used to facilitate sexual assault.

## Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Prophylaxis

487 of female patients received emergency contraception (EC). EC was not indicated in the remainder for a range of reasons including age, pre-existing effective contraceptive and patient preference.

All units offer Chlamydia prophylaxis, Hepatitis B vaccination and risk assessment for HIV postexposure prophylaxis (PEPSE) at time of SATU attendance. 53% of patients received Chlamydia prophylaxis, 51% commenced a Hepatitis B immunisation programme and 7% started postexposure prophylaxis for HIV.

## STI Screening



- 549 (75%) either had an STI screen at their first attendance or were offered an appointment for STI follow up.
- 397 (72%) of those given a follow up appointment attended for follow-up STI screening which means 152 did not return for their screen. It is important to highlight the importance of offering prophylaxis at the time of initial attendance to reduce the long term health effects of sexual violence.

# Updates from Each **Sexual Assault Treatment Unit** Service in Ireland

Cork SATU

Dublin SATU

Galway SATU

Waterford SATU

Mullingar SATU

Donegal SATU

MidWest Forensic Medical

## The Key Message

It was no ordinary year! 2020 has seen people all over the world contend with a new normal: mask rules, lockdowns, restrictions, travel bans, economic crisis where families and loved ones are separated. Yet, even with the pandemic as a backdrop, life went on, storms weathered, wildfires raged, countries held elections; protesters took to the streets, and essential health services changed, like never before, to accommodate patients who required their care. Included among those, is the SATU services, which continued to work 24/7, 365 days of the year, ensuring we were available to meet patients when they were ready to come.



Cork SATU has seen 111 new attendances in 2020; this is a decrease of 33 patients from 2019, a decrease which can surely be attributed in some form to Covid-19 and the 'new normal' people found themselves living. 92% (n=102) of those who attended were female, and 8% (n=9) were male, which remains almost double the number of male patients seen in 2018 and 2017. Additionally, 197 patients were seen at follow up clinics, with a further 148 referrals made by SATU staff to other services at the time of a patient's first attendance. This is a representation of the holistic care provided by staff, when treating our patients, in order to improve the overall patient outcomes.

Over the past year, the world has been consumed with talks of the global pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns and restrictions caused by Covid-19. It has been suggested that these mass efforts to save lives, may be putting some people at risk in their own homes or places familiar to them. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has been somewhat reflected in the patients who attended Cork SATU. In 2020, 47% of all incidents occurred in either the victim or the assailant's home, compared to 28% in 2019. Furthermore 42% of patients described the assailant as a 'friend' or an 'acquaintance greater than 24hrs' compared to 30% who used the same descriptions the previous year. Disturbingly, this was not the only trend we saw increase. During the time periods which saw the enforcement of level 5 lockdown, there was an increase of physical injuries to those who presented to SATU. Between March 27th and May 18th 2020, 54% of patients presented with physical injuries compared to 25% the previous year, and while there was no marked increase in the volume of injuries during the second level 5 lockdown between October 21st and November 30th 2020 and the same period in 2019, of those that did present with injuries, 22% required referral for injury follow up in 2020 compared to zero patients requiring referral in the same time period the previous year. This highlights how restrictive measures, societal conditions and infection risk management may have elevated risks for victims of sexual violence and the importance of SATU as a responsive service to their needs.

Cork SATU witnessed an increase in the volume of patients referred to the service by An Garda Síochána in

2020, at 56% versus 49% in 2019. However, while this increase existed, of those that did report to the Gardaí, 2020 saw less patients report the assault within the first 24hrs compared to 2019, 60% in 2020 compared to 78% in 2019. Furthermore of those patients who did not report the assault to the Gardaí, in 2020, 31% of patients were over a month since the incident when they first presented to SATU compared to 18% in 2019.

While sexual assault can occur at any age, 2020 saw the age profile of patients attending our service change notably. In 2020, 33% of patients who attended were aged 18-24 years, compared to 43% in this age category in 2019. Additionally, 23% of patients in 2020 were aged 35 years or older compared to 13% in 2019. Furthermore, 5% of patients who attended in 2020 were aged between 55-70 years, where no patients were seen aged over 55 years in 2019.

Like all healthcare settings, in order to keep patients and staff safe, Cork SATU services adapted how we worked ensuring we continued to provide optimum care for our patients. Prior to Covid-19, members of the Sexual Violence Centre Cork (SVCC) attended SATU to meet patients, providing them with ongoing links to psychological support services. Covid-19 became a real barrier for this; SVCC psychological support workers were no longer able to attend the SATU in person to meet patients. Only 14% of patients who attended our service in 2020 met with a member of the SVCC support team compared to 81% in 2019. While phone contact was established for a further 63% of patients, this may be somewhat impersonal and less effective. The gap in care was identified and through the National SATU Services fund, we received two iPads which allowed staff the opportunity to connect patients with psychological support via Zoom, providing a more personal experience where they could see the worker they were connecting to. Furthermore the iPads provided a facility to reduce face to face contact time between staff and patients who may be high risk for Covid-19, but who still required the use of SATU services. It has also allowed staff to attend more virtual education sessions, enhancing practice skills.

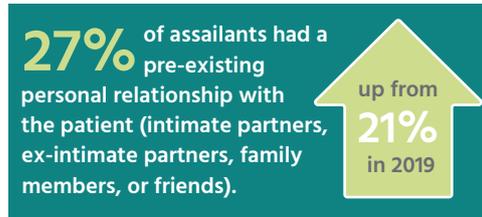
On the 14th September 2020, refurbishment works commenced at the Family Centre (FC) in St Finbarr's Hospital Cork, a service which provides care to children 13 years and under who have experienced sexual violence, which continued into early January 2021. During this time Cork SATU, along with caring for their own patients, provided use of the SATU facilities to the Family Centre. This enabled them to continue providing appropriate medical and forensic care to the children who needed it. 11 children aged between 0-13 years attended the service during that period and, while challenging at times, this was an extremely beneficial initiative for both services. It allowed staff from different specialities to work together and share expertise in relation to caring for young teenagers, which can often be a very complex process.

In 2020, Margo Noonan continued on her final year pathway as a candidate Advanced Nurse Practitioner in Sexual Assault Forensic Examination and Louise Tiernan completed her Certificate in Nurse Prescribing. We welcomed three new support nurses, Claire Ryan, Carol Mills and Teresa O'Farrell. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all SATU staff, with special mention to the local management and hospital staff in the South Infirmery Victoria University Hospital: Dr. John Coulter Medical Director of SATU, Dr. Emer O'Flynn FME and Dr. Suzanne Cremin FME. The continued commitment, support and dedication shown to the unit and our patients, does not go unnoticed.

# Dublin (Rotunda)

## The Key Message

2020 was a year focussed on adaptability within the Dublin SATU (Rotunda Hospital). The use of virtual and audio-visual technologies, new Covid screening measures, and other creative solutions allowed us to maximise the health and safety of our patients and staff members, while keeping sensitive, individualised care at the heart of our efforts.



## Introduction

Despite the unique challenges confronted during the Covid-19 pandemic, our primary aim did not change—to ensure that those who needed help and support in the aftermath of sexual violence received it. We worked in collaboration with our interagency colleagues to offer an uninterrupted service, providing high quality, timely care to individuals who experienced sexual assault or rape.

## 2020 Review

In 2020, 277 patients attended the Dublin SATU— 255 women, 21 men and 1 person with another gender identity. This was a 30% fall in overall patient attendance from the previous year. The majority of patients (79%) attended the SATU within 7 days of an assault. For those patients who requested a forensic examination, 89% were seen within 3 hours by a Forensic Clinical Examiner. Following initial care, 98% of patients were given an STI review appointment, and there was a notable increase in attendance for follow-up care in 2020 (66%) when compared to 2019 (56%).

Throughout 2020, we continued to offer our full range of care options to patients, including the option to attend for a forensic examination for storage of evidence. This year, Dr Daniel Kane, one of our forensic medical examiners, published research reviewing the uptake of the storage of evidence option by patients in the Dublin SATU since the initiative's introduction in August 2016. This study showed that 20% of patients who chose to store their evidence subsequently reported their assault to An Garda Síochána. These findings reinforce the importance of allowing people time to consider whether they wish to participate in the criminal justice process and the value of this option as a means to encourage reporting of sexual crime.

During the height of the pandemic, SATU staff were redeployed to support on-site Covid swabbing services twice a week for several months. Nevertheless, staffing was well maintained this year. Ms. Christine Pucillo and Ms. Naomi Finnegan earned their qualifications as Clinical Nurse/Midwife Specialists, joining the core SATU team as full-time forensic clinical examiners. We also welcomed several new medical colleagues to the on-call forensic examiner rota. The dedication of our on-call forensic clinical examiners and support nurses is invaluable to ensuring that round-the-clock SATU care is sustainable. The need to rely on another unit to cover the Dublin on-call service arose only once during the entire year, for a single five hour shift—a vast improvement on previous years.

Due to the significant health risks posed by Covid-19, the Dublin SATU implemented innovative service modifications to allow for continued provision of care. Patients were contacted prior to their appointments to be screened for potential Covid exposure, and the use of video technology on iPads enabled remote visual interaction between examiners and patients during consultations. Traditional in-person options for providing education to staff and the wider community were also unavailable because of Covid restrictions. However, with the assistance of the Rotunda Research Department, SATU staff filmed multiple short videos, including a walk-through tour of the unit and a review of the examination process. These videos aided ongoing training and staff orientation and will serve to augment our suite of educational resources for future use.

## Galway

### The Key Message

Care adapts and continues despite challenging times.

Despite the SARS CoV2 pandemic:



Early 2020 was a time of great energy and enthusiasm at Galway SATU. First we moved to our fresh and bright current premises in Galway City East Primary Care Centre. As this is shared premises we named ourselves "The Willow Centre" for discrete signage, willows being associated in Celtic mythology with new growth and healing, optimism, movement and adaptability. Soon after we ran the second iteration of the SATU/NUIG Introductory Sexual Assault Forensic Examination course for doctors and our four CNSs joined the on-call roster on completion of their prescribing courses. We were able to care well for our patients and the CNS team was working hard developing an outreach and education programme locally and in the region. It looked as though it would be a productive and successful year.

Of course, all our memories of 2020 will now be dominated by the incredible changes the pandemic has brought. Quietly and efficiently, the Galway team, in consultation locally with University Hospital Galway (UHG) and our SATU network colleagues, brought in new practices and protocols to ensure continuation of

safe and timely care for SATU patients. Administrative, nursing and medical members of the SATU team also joined the COVID effort in UHG supporting the Infectious Diseases service. As in other SATUs, the absence of physical attendance of Psychological Support Workers in SATU ceased for a number of months. Thankfully, phone/iPad contact has now been established allowing patients the opportunity to speak to a Psychological Support Worker when attending the SATU. Interagency work, including ongoing development of the Barnahus/One House pilot in Galway, went virtual and we all learned the challenges, benefits and frustrations of Zoom. Some of these adaptations will serve us well in the future, but we all long for the return of safe human-to-human contact with our patients and colleagues.

Every year, even when there is no global emergency, we are very grateful for the support of our many SATU network, hospital and interagency colleagues; in 2020 that meant even more. We do however want to give special mention and thanks to Drs Christy and Brian Higgins of Galway City East Primary Care Centre for their exceptional support to the SATU staff and service, not only with our move and the early days of the pandemic so soon after, but throughout the year.

# Waterford

## The Key Message

The SATU at UHW continues to serve male and female clients over the age of fourteen years and engages with all relevant multi agencies in the south east region namely Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

There were 78 new attendances at the SATU in UHW in 2020

an increase of **21%** from 2019



Of the clients attending 66 (85%) reported the incident to An Garda Siochana. Of which 47 (71%) were seen within 72 hours.

Throughout 2020 the client's needs were more complex with an increase in admissions from 1 in 2019 to 4 in 2020

and an increase in the administration of HIV PEP from 6(8%) in 2019 to 9(12%) in 2020.

**92%** (72) Female

**8%** Male (6)

An increase in males of 2 (50%) when compared with 2019.

The first lockdown period (March-June) SATU saw an unprecedented increase (44%) in attendances when compared with the same period in 2019. During this period 81% of sexual assault/rape happened in private homes.

The mean age was 26 years of age, the youngest was 14, the eldest was 72 years (the minimum age criteria is 14 years)

The age group accounting for the highest number of attendances was 18-25 years with 20 (28%) of patients attending.

The age group with the highest increase in attendances in 2020 was the 14-16 year olds which saw an increase from 6 in 2019 to 15 in 2020 an alarming increase of 150%

Three fourteen year olds attending SATU in 2020 required admission to hospital under the care of a Paediatrician.

22 (28%) patients attending the SATU had physical trauma. Of these 18 (82%) had superficial injuries not requiring further treatment, 2 (3%) patients were referred to the Emergency Department with minor trauma 2 (1.4%) patients were seriously injured and required hospitalisation due to their injury.



## 2020 Review:

Funding for refurbishment of the SATU at UHW was allocated and received with work due to commence early in the year but were stalled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Social distancing measures introduced have highlighted the need for a larger clinical area to allow for social distancing. Patient feedback has reiterated the need for a second examination room (for follow up appointments) in order to improve patient experience. A permanent and more suitable premises has yet to be identified and is under consideration by the General Manager.

Agnes Cooney-Lee CNM 2 in SATU at UHW retired in September 2020, all of us at SATU UHW wish her a long and happy retirement. Recruitment for a new CNM 2 is currently underway.

In 2020 two forensic examiners and two assisting nurses stepped down from the out of hours on call rota at SATU we wish them every success in the future.

One forensic examiner is currently on maternity leave.

- Training of additional forensic examiners was stalled due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Training and education was predominantly online due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the Medical director, clinical nurse specialists, and on call nurses completed a wide range of online training and virtually attended webinars locally, nationally and internationally on a variety of relevant topics.

I wish to thank and acknowledge all the hard work and effort by everyone involved with the provision of services at the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) UHW including Dr. Bermingham (Medical Director), Paula Curtin (Director of Midwifery), Nursing Management, all the Forensic Examiners, Assisting Nurses and Support Workers from the Waterford Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre.

I wish to thank and acknowledge our colleagues in the Infectious disease departments of Cork University Hospital and The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Dublin who are continuously flexible and compassionate when providing care to the clients we refer.

## Mullingar

### The Key Message

Despite the challenges that COVID -19 has presented us with, 2020 has proved to be one of SATU Mullingar's most productive years to date. The staff have committed to the provision of quality care and continued to embrace change and developments so that we can provide the best possible service for our patients.



**101 Patients**  
seen in 2020 a  
decrease of 20  
patients on the  
previous year

**100%**

of forensic  
cases were seen  
within 3 hours of initial referral



Referrals seen from



Counties

## **Introduction:**

2020 was a year like no other. Covid 19 although difficult, has provided the team in Mullingar SATU time to address service provision to adjust and adapt according to the challenges that have faced us. In addressing these challenges (e.g. patient contact, online education and training through Webinars and meetings) we have identified new and more productive processes that will be adopted as part of our core strategy.

## **Key Service Activity**

- March was the busiest month with 16 cases. Tuesday was the busiest day for presentations with 16 (16%) of patients presenting that day. 66 (65%) of patients attended during the daytime hours of 08:00-19:59.
- In total, 74 (73%) of cases reported the incident to An Garda Síochána at some stage of which 100 (72%) of cases were reported <7days of the incident and had a forensic clinical examination where a forensic kit was used.
- 26 (25%) cases reported that the assailant was an acquaintance and in 17(16%) cases the reported assailant was an ex intimate partner. 5 (4.9%) cases reported the assailant to be a family member.

## **Updates**

2020 brought new developments and opportunities for Mullingar SATU; Nessa Gill was successful in application for Candidate Advanced Nurse Practitioner which is a welcome development for SATU RHM Services. Catherine Marsh completed the Certificate in Nurse Prescribing with UCD and is now a Registered Nurse Prescriber.

Another great achievement for Mullingar SATU was hosting the 13th SATU Inter-Agency Study Day which took place on the Oct 9th 2020. Covid-19 restrictions meant that this study day for the first time would be a virtual webinar event. Together with the help of Project lead Sarah O' Connor, The Mullingar Team were not shy in coming forward to learning new IT skills and equipping themselves with the knowledge required to run a Zoom webinar. This was daunting at first but like all challenges set for the team they put the time and effort into the learning and results paid off. Coordinated by SATU, professionals from agencies to include the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, An Garda Síochána, Rape Crisis Centres, Forensic Science Ireland attended this engaging and informative day, sharing knowledge on pertinent topical issues. Record attendance figures were achieved with over 550 accessing this virtual event, this new delivery method also resulted in the largest attendance numbers recorded both nationally and internationally. Feedback from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive and as a team Mullingar SATU showcased all that is positive about our service.

We would like to thank the team in SATU Mullingar for their continued commitment to support the on-call rota from the Forensic Medical Examiners Barbara Hynes and Charlotte Coyle, FNE Sarah O'Connor, Medical Director Professor Gannon, along with our seven Support Nurses Mary Cleary, Marie Corbett, Liz O'Grady-Brennan, Patricia Smith, Shirley Martin, Edel Shannon, and Stacey Egan. Not forgetting the Clerical Staff Irene Monaghan and Moya Doran who have ensured that SATU Mullingar has thrived and flourished during 2020.

## The Key Message

2020 was a monumental year for the Donegal Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) with the opening of the first purpose built SATU in the Republic of Ireland. Following eleven years of being temporarily facilitated in the NoWDOC premises in Letterkenny this was a much needed and welcome development for patients and SATU staff. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank NoWDOC Management and staff in their support for the SATU service. The compassion and respect shown to patients attending the SATU service by all NoWDOC staff was commendable. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the National Women and Infants Health Programme and the senior management at Letterkenny University Hospital (LUH); in particular Ms Siobhan Kelly (Assistant Director of Nursing) and Dr Anne Drake (Director of Nursing) who supported and recognised the need for a dedicated Unit, sought much needed funding and worked with us collaboratively in the development and design of the new unit. Finally, we would like to thank Dr Chris King (Consultant Obstetrics & Gynaecology) who has supported the SATU service from its inception in 1998 to date. Without his clinical guidance, kindness, approachability and unrelenting support, the Donegal SATU would not be in operation as it is today.



## Introduction

For the past decade the Donegal SATU has experienced year-on-year increases in patient attendances to the service. Covid-19 restrictions beginning in March 2020 led to a 29% decrease in patient attendances and a decrease in referrals from key agencies. The lack of increased staffing within the Donegal SATU remains a concern for the sustainability of the service in the northwest. Yet similar to previous years the service maintained 24 hour cover throughout the year with no patients diverted to other SATUs.

## 2020 Review

78 patients attended the Donegal SATU in 2020, of which 9% identified as male; this was 29% lower than numbers attending in 2019. 26 (33%) referrals came from An Garda Síochána and 7(9%) came from GPs. This highlighted a 10% decrease in referrals from An Garda Síochána and General Practitioners (GPs) respectively. However, self-referrals increased by 7%.

46(59%) patients reported the incident to An Garda Síochána indicating that 26% of patients who had not previously reported to An Garda Síochána went on to report following support from SATU. 48 (62%) patients attended the SATU within one month compared to 84 (76%) patients attending the SATU during the same period in 2019. 23% less patients attended within seven days. During the initial lockdown (March, April & May), 68% fewer patients attended compared to 2019. In addition, the trend of presentations to the SATU altered from weekend to weekday with a 71% reduction of weekend attendances compared to 2019. Enforced periods of restricted movement in Donegal continued to impact on patient attendances to the

Unit. The lack of face-to-face consultations with GPs and the fear of reporting to the Gardaí because of COVID-19 restrictions were some of the reasons given by patients as to why they did not report the incidents within the timeframe.

The age profile of patients attending the SATU service in 2020 was comparative to previous years with a mean age of 24 years. 53 (68%) patient attendances were 25 years-of-age or under. 30% were under 18 years of age and 38% between 18 and 25 years of age. Although patients who attend 2nd level school had a slight increase of 2% compared to 2019, the number of patient attendances from 3rd level colleges decreased by 15% compared to 2019.

96% of patients had the opportunity to speak with a Rape Crisis Centre (RCC) Psychological Support Worker (PSW) at their initial visit to SATU. However, due to Covid restrictions face-to-face support did not occur and 58% of patients availed of support through phone contact.

Patients attending for follow-up care continued to remain high with 94% of patients attending 1st follow-up appointments. Based on patient feedback, flexibility of appointment times and the provision of satellite clinics may be a contributing factor.

Staff resources have not been forthcoming in order to enhance the core team within the Donegal SATU. The lack of increased staffing over the past five years has necessitated the continuous working of two staff managing the day-to-day operational aspect of the service, the provision of education and training to 3rd level, statutory and non-statutory agencies and sustaining the 24 hour on-call rota with 100% coverage throughout the year. However, there were positive developments at the end of 2020 with the approval of an Administrator (Grade 5 WTE); to be employed in early 2021 and the promotion of Connie Mc Gilloway from Clinical Nurse Specialist to Registered Advanced Nurse Practitioner. Online training and education, meetings and facilitation became the new norm in 2020 and multi-agency collaboration thrived throughout the year.

### **From 'Care Unit' to 'SATU' - a Reflection on the Donegal SATU Journey**

First established in 1998 as the 'Care Unit', the Donegal SATU based in LUH became the second SATU in Ireland (O'Shea, 2006). A group of concerned nursing Staff, a Registrar from the Emergency Department, the good will of five local GPs and a clinical lead initiated the service; recognising the need to improve services for victims of sexual violence in Donegal (O'Shea, 2006). Through the efforts and commitment of staff in LUH, a small budget from the HSE for nursing support and the efforts of local fundraising, the SATU service became operational. However, due to a lack of dedicated funding and a reduction in GP involvement, the service became unsustainable and many patients travelled to the Rotunda, Dublin for forensic clinical examinations. In 2008, the SATU facility within the LUH campus was tumbled to make way for a large extension to the hospital, the service was working out of a Gate lodge for a minimal number of hours per day. In 2009 NoWDOC offered the SATU service 24 hour access to two rooms and a dedicated shower within the disabled access restroom. However, due the busy nature of the NoWDOC service and the sensitivity and confidentiality of persons attending the SATU, patients accessed the service up a metal fire escape with a screen positioned across the corridor in order to maintain confidentiality. Patient's highlighted the inadequacy of the rooms, fear of being seen by NoWDOC patients; "I didn't like walking into NoWDOC in case someone saw me" feeling re-traumatised; "...On my return visit I would of preferred not to return to the same place I was first seen. It has brought back bad memories" and by the covert nature of accessing the Unit *"...I was brought up through a side entrance up steel stairs I was confused scared and it did not appear an appropriate setting. There was only a*

*foldable screen hiding me from patients in now doc. I had no idea who was there but I could hear people. It was not private or secluded ...it was overwhelming."*

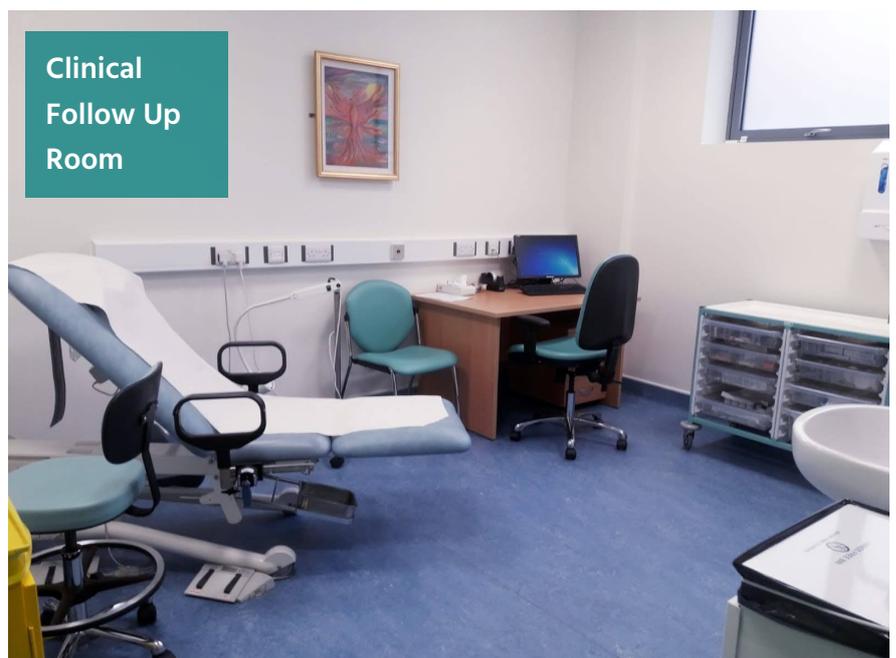
This qualitative data highlighted the need for a dedicated Unit and recognition of this need attained fruition in May 2020.

The design of the new SATU facility had the patient's journey through the SATU service at its core. Privacy and confidentiality, forensic care, follow-up care, a quiet area to allow for psychological support and easy access to the service were central to this. The service is accessible via two entrances; one from an underground car park and the second via disabled access from the road. Free dedicated parking spaces are assigned for patients and the Sexual Assault Response Team. The facility is designed specifically to meet the needs of the patients and even though initial entrance to the service is via a protected key pad the bright, spacious surroundings create a welcoming environment. The kind donation of beautiful paintings to the Unit by local artist, Siobhan Gillespie softens the clinical space. The Forensic area is a key-padded safe area, incorporating interview room, forensic room and shower/toilet facilities. Once all forensic care is complete the patient does not return to this area. Follow-up care is in a spacious clinical room in a different area of the Unit so the patient is not re-traumatized by having to return to the same area of their initial attendance. In conclusion, the interpretation of the lived experience of patients attending the new SATU facility shines a more positive light on the comfort of their environment and one we are proud to have been instrumental in providing:

*"The service I received was second to none. I was treated with respect and didn't feel any judgement as one could feel embarrassed or uncomfortable during an encounter in the clinic. I felt very safe and secure in the clinic and the clinic itself was spotless, clean and a warming environment. I cannot say enough how helpful and caring the support I received was. Thank you for being there and going above and beyond to make me comfortable."*

And

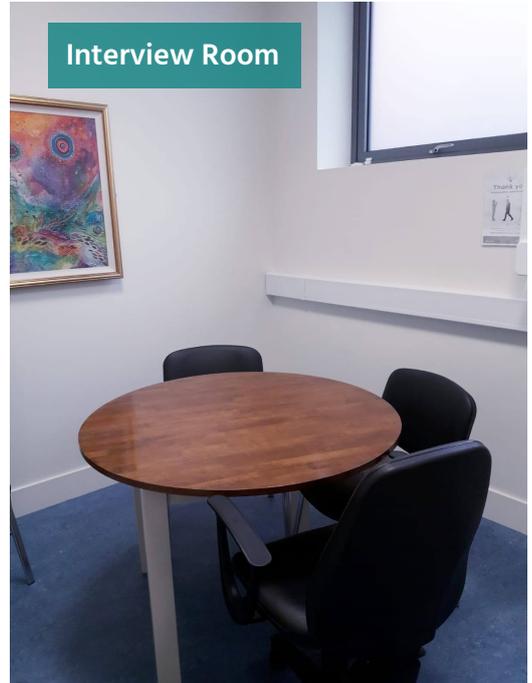
*"...I would definitely recommend to anyone who have suffered a crisis this is a safe and secure place to get help and reassurance!"*



Single Office



Interview Room



Double Office



Kitchen



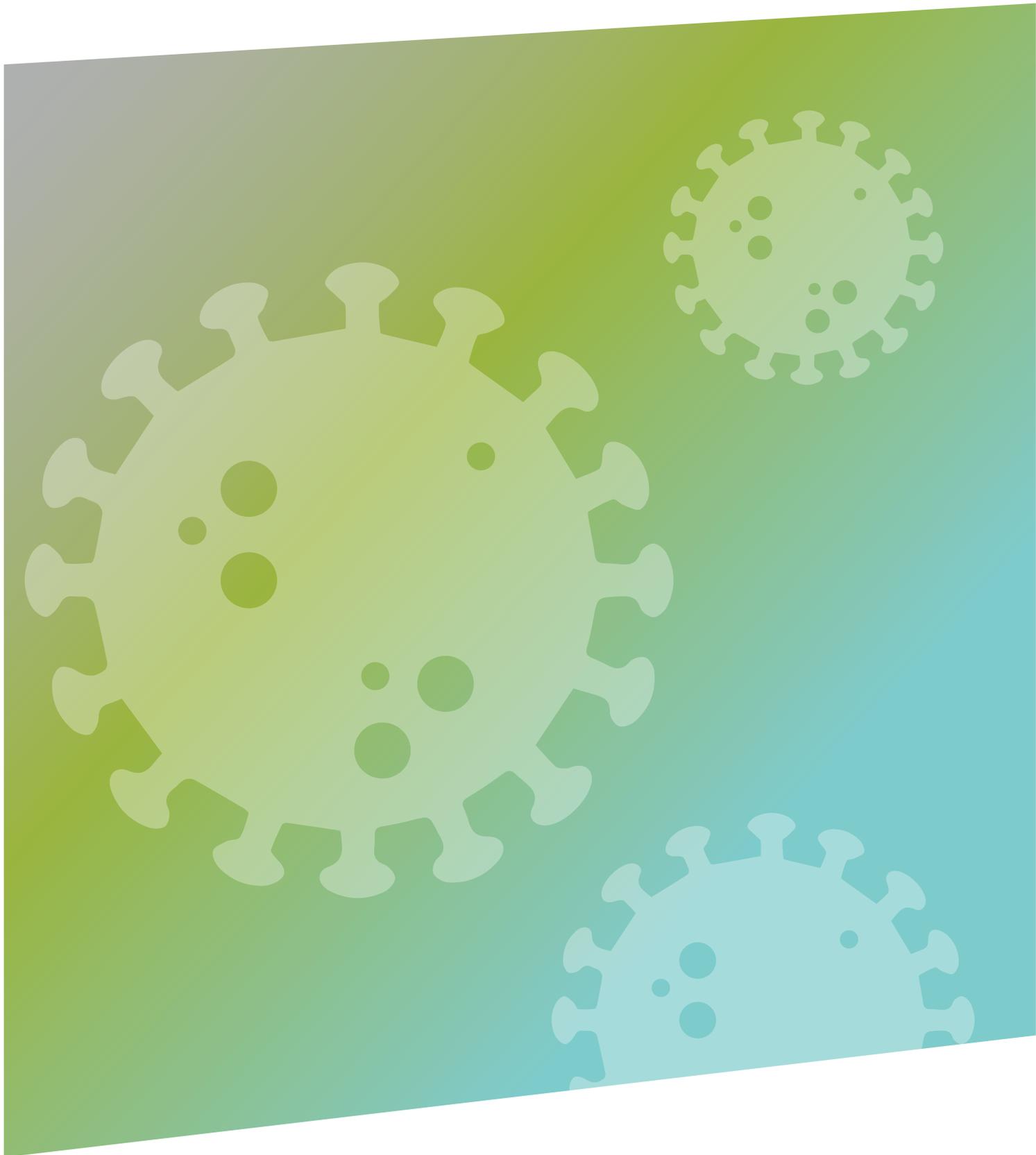
Storage Area for Charts and Freezers



## Mid West Forensic Medical Examination Service (Limerick)

The Mid West Forensic Medical Examination Service (FME) was established in 2006 and provides a comprehensive Forensic Medical Examination Service. This service is open to both male and female aged 14 years and upward who have experienced rape or sexual assault and area referred by An Garda Siochana. This is an Out of Hours Service Monday to Friday 6pm to 8am and 24 hours over weekends and Public Holidays, with on call commitment being provided by Eight Forensic Clinical Examiners (General Practitioners) through Shannondoc. The service is delivered from a clinical room at University Hospital Limerick and provided care for 24 people in 2020 (1 man and 23 women) an increase from 20 in 2019, with an age range of 14 to 49. Limerick Rape Crisis Network volunteers are specifically trained to attend at forensic medical examinations with victims and their family/friend and attended approximately 76% of these examinations in 2020.

# The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the **SATU** Services in Ireland



# The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the SATU Services in Ireland

Similar to other healthcare sectors, the Irish SATU services felt the inevitable effects of the COVID pandemic. Prior to the first confirmed case, 2020 was on course to be a busier year for the SATU services than 2019, and indeed attendances had been increasing year on year since 2009. However, from March to December 2020, SATU attendances decreased nationally by 27%. SATU metrics from this period have been collated from the six SATUs and compared with the same period in 2019, asking the question, "What was the impact on sexual assault treatment services in Ireland during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic?"

## Trends Observed During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Following the first Covid-19 case on the 29th of February, SATUs provided service to 594 patients nationwide



which was a 27% decrease from the same period in 2019



During the two strictest restriction periods of the pandemic- from March 27th to May 18th and from October 21st to November 30th- overall SATU attendances fell by 32% and 49%, respectively.

Unfortunately, even during a global pandemic, sexual crime continued to occur. This is particularly significant when considering that existing rape myths perpetuate the idea that sexual violence is often the result of socialising in pub and club settings and excessive use of alcohol or drugs. Despite nationwide closures of these locations, there was a continued need to see and care for people in SATUs following rape and sexual assault, effectively debunking these myths.

From March to December 2020, incidents were more likely to take place in a person's or assailant's home (48% vs 42% in 2019). In line with reports of increased domestic violence, assailants were less likely to be strangers or recent acquaintances (34% vs 45%) and more likely to be an intimate partner, ex-partner, or family member (19% vs 14%). There was also an increased use of restraints (33% vs 27%) or threats (22% vs 18%) by assailants during an assault.

More patients under the age of 18 years (25% vs 19%) and less patients between 18 to 35 years (54% vs 63%) attended for care in 2020 than in 2019.



There was an increase in the number of assaults in which the patient did not consume any alcohol in the 24 hours prior to the incident (38% vs 26%).



There was no change in the number of assaults in which the patient did not take any drugs in the 24 hours prior to the incident (74%).



Fewer incidents were reported to have occurred during night time hours (70% vs 80%).



The percentage of patients reporting concerns that their assault may have been facilitated by drugs, including alcohol, did not change for both years (17%).

COVID-related disruptions to other aspects of society appeared to also impact SATU. Due to school and university closures, many of the well-established SATU educational programmes could not be offered, resulting in missed opportunities for outreach and engagement with students. Indeed, a dip in the percentage of third level students who sought SATU care was noted (11% vs 17%). Similarly, throughout the pandemic, patients cited lack of access to sufficient resources such as public transportation or childcare options as reasons for the need to cancel or reschedule their care. Accounts of increased job loss during the pandemic appeared to be reflected in the occupation status provided by patients, with less people reporting employment (22% vs 32%) and more people reporting unemployment (30% vs 24%).

That being said, how patients sought care following an assault remained relatively unchanged. Self-referrals decreased marginally (13% vs 15%), while referrals from the Rape Crisis Centre (RCC) accounted for 4% in 2020, up from 3% during the same period in 2019. Referrals from GPs and other healthcare providers held steady at 5%, even as access to these providers may have been limited by the high demand of COVID cases and queries.

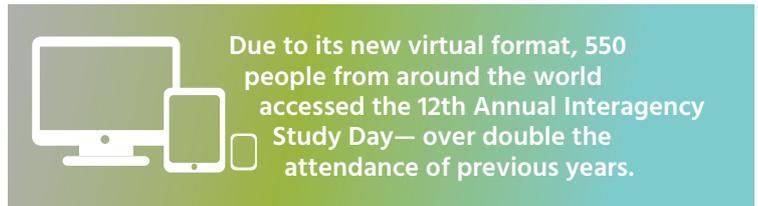
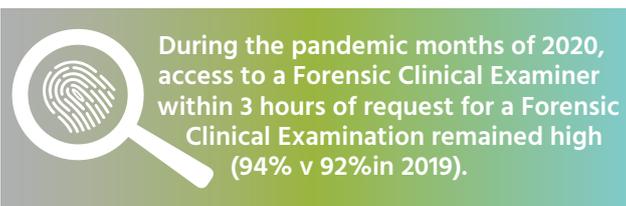
There was concern that fear of repercussions for restriction breaches at the time of assault may prevent or delay reporting to An Garda Síochána. Similar to 2019, though, the majority of referrals were received by the SATU via the Gardaí (63% vs 64%). Patients also did not seem to avail of the storage of evidence option any more frequently from March to December 2020 (9%) than they did during the same period in 2019 (10%). Nor was there a major increase in the number of patients seeking medical care without Garda involvement (22% vs 19%). While there was a decrease in patients who reported to Gardaí within 24 hours post-incident (52% vs 57%), there was an increase in patients who reported between 24-72 hours (24% vs 20%). This would seem to indicate that a person's decision to seek acute SATU care was not hugely affected or delayed by the prospect of Garda involvement. However, it is also important to acknowledge the possibility that those individuals most concerned about the potential of being penalised for violations of pandemic restrictions may have avoided care in the SATU setting entirely.



## The SATU Services' Response to COVID-19

SATUs continued to provide round-the-clock care for patients with minimal disruption to service. Measures were put in place to off-set anticipated COVID-related delays to service provision. Collaboration with other agencies and the UK Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine (FFLM) helped shape ongoing provision of forensic care in the event of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection. Alternative care pathways were considered and utilised for symptomatic or close contact individuals seeking SATU care. For instance, following a telephone-based assessment, time-sensitive emergency contraception or post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV could be collected by Gardaí and provided to a patient who was awaiting COVID test results prior to SATU attendance.

A shift towards the use of virtual technologies— while not a replacement for in-person interaction— provided a workable solution to the requirement for social distancing. Remote video software was used to facilitate communication between examiners and patients, and across the SATU network itself. The 12th Annual SATU Interagency Study Day in October 2020 was hosted by Mullingar SATU using a virtual, webinar-based format. This not only allowed for the participation of international speakers, but it also resulted in record high attendance from national and international multidisciplinary agencies. Similarly, more SATU staff were able to access the virtual conferences internationally (e.g. International Association of Forensic Nursing) without the need for travel.



Unfortunately, there were some changes to service provision that could not be avoided in order to mitigate the risk of COVID transmission in SATUs. Restrictions were put in place on the number of Gardaí and accompanying support persons who could attend a consultation. Access to in-person psychological support by RCC was also affected. From March to December 2020, 45% of patients had the opportunity to speak to a psychological support worker at their first SATU visit, compared to 78% of patients in the same period of 2019. When available, this support was more likely to occur over the phone, with in-person support occurring considerably less often (26% vs 92%).

In the acute stages of the pandemic, a service-wide decision was also made that non-urgent care in the sexual health follow-up clinics be deferred to facilitate an adjusted schedule. In response, cancellation lists were created, ensuring that SATU staff contacted patients at a future date to rearrange these appointments. This provided flexibility to those patients who expressed concern about attending at the height of the pandemic, but who still wished to complete their ongoing care in SATU. A screening process was also introduced to assess patients' COVID risk prior to SATU attendance. Despite the challenges presented by COVID, national attendance for follow-up care increased slightly from March to December 2020 (72%) when compared to the same period in 2019 (69%).



There was a slight decline in referrals to the RCC (63% vs 66%).



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency



There was a slight increase in referrals to Tusla (18% vs 15%).



There was little to no change in SATU referrals to all other sources, highlighting our continued engagement with and direction of patients to other supportive resources to the same degree as we did prior to the pandemic.

## The Future Impact of COVID-19

While we cannot directly attribute these findings to the pandemic and associated restrictions, this comparison of SATU attendances between March to December 2020 and 2019 underscores the importance of prospective data analysis. Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore qualitative aspects of the SATU journey during the pandemic, including the effects on the patient experience, as well as the role of anxiety (about becoming ill, facing stigma, or being blamed for not complying with restrictions) in patients' care-seeking behaviours. Ultimately, while life dramatically changed and social restrictions had major consequences for society, sexual crime unfortunately did not disappear. SATU care continues to be an essential and effective service despite the unprecedented changes in 2020.





