

Understanding our Service Users

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In 2004 an analysis was carried out of SMC's Client Statistical Return Forms. It covered the period from January to September. A detailed analysis of demographic information and reasons for attending counselling allowed a clear profile of SMC clients to emerge.

Relationship counselling for couples and individuals

The majority of clients (88%) were found to attend counselling as a couple and 1% of these were same sex couples. 12% of clients attended counselling as individuals. The majority of SMC clients attended as married couples and therefore an even split between the two genders was expected. However, 46% of SMC clients are male and 54% of clients are female. This prevalence of females indicates most clients who seek counselling on an individual basis are female.



Most common age range of SMC clients:

- 16-24 years (3%)
- 25-34 years (28%)
- 35-44 years (41%)
- 45-55 years (23%)
- Over 55 years (5%)



Ethnic Group

Clients were almost entirely of White/European ethnicity (88%) and their nationality was described as British or Scottish (80%). 1% of our clients were of Asian ethnicity and a further 11% of cases did not state the client's ethnicity, however these clients were most likely to have been White/European. In terms of Scotland as a whole, Black and Minority Ethnic groups make up approximately 2% of the population and so our statistics reflect this overall.

Religious background of SMC clients:

- Roman Catholic (43%)
- Church of Scotland (26%)
- No religion (19%)
- Muslim (1%)
- Other religions (3%)
- Not known (8%)

Social background

In general, it can be said SMC clients come from *all social backgrounds*. The most common social class of SMC clients was 'Professional' with 30% falling into this category. A further 25% of clients were classed as 'Skilled/Clerical' and 18% were classed as 'Semi/Unskilled'. 13% of SMC clients were 'Unemployed'; 4% fell into the 'Managerial' category and a further 4% were 'Self-employed'. Only 3% of those surveyed were students and a further 3% were retired.

Relationship Status

In terms of relationship status, the majority (80%) of clients were married, while a further 8% were co-habiting. Only 6% were divorced and 4% were single. A further 2% of clients were separated. It was found that clients come for counselling at all stages in their relationships.

Average length of relationship

Although there was no most common stage for seeking counselling, the average length of relationship was 14 years. 22% of SMC clients had been in their relationship for up to 5 years and 18% of clients had been in their relationship for 6-10 years. 20% of clients had been in their relationship for between 11-15 years and 16% of clients had been in their relationship for 16-20 years. Just 10% of clients had been in their relationship for 21-25 years and 14% of clients had been in their relationship for 26 years or more.



Reasons for seeking counselling



SMC clients usually sought help with several relationship issues but overwhelmingly the most common was communication (69%). Most couples find themselves unable to discuss difficult issues such as sex or power share. Others continually argue over the same things and are unable to resolve the conflict until they have dealt with the underlying issues. Other common presenting problems include infidelity (20%), financial problems (15%) and task sharing. On average, the number of counselling sessions that SMC clients attended was just four, supporting research evidence that counselling helps unhappy relationships quickly (McKeown et al, 2002).

Outcomes

- Relationship counselling is a successful early intervention as a high percentage of clients were still married or in a committed relationship.
- Counselling is appropriate for all age groups. SMC clients range in age from early 20's to late 50's / 60.
- Relationship counselling is sought by people of all religions and those of no stated religion.
- Relationship counselling is sought by people from all social backgrounds.
- SMC data reveals relationship difficulties are wide-ranging and complex. The professional expertise of trained counsellors is paramount in achieving a good outcome.
- Relationship counselling is a highly cost effective intervention, with an average of four sessions costing around £200.
- Relationship counselling has a positive influence on individuals, couples, families, communities, physical and mental health, and employment.