



Research findings: a study into the factors that enable and prevent women attending cervical smears

The study aimed to understand what helps some women regularly attend their cervical smear after experiencing sexual assault, and what makes it harder for others. It was undertaken with the help of charities and support groups for women who have experienced sexual assault, who shared, amongst other elements, a questionnaire asking the psychological factors that may help or hinder attending a cervical smear test.

What helps women want to go and actually go to their cervical smear?

1. Focusing on why smears are personally important and necessary for women, rather than focusing on the risks if they do not attend
2. Enabling the individual to feel confident and consulted in the planning of when and where they will attend their smear

Small ways to help yourself in building your confidence to attend a cervical smear:

1. Achieve small goals and celebrate each step e.g. researching what a cervical is can be a goal
2. Identify personal reasons why attending a smear is important, necessary and worthwhile for you
3. Think in advance about ways to cope if you find the smear difficult e.g. focusing on physical symptoms, using mindfulness or breathing techniques
4. Make a detailed plan about when/where/how you will attend your next cervical smear—maybe ask a friend to help with this

How charities/support groups/services can learn from this:

1. Break down cervical smear attendance into small steps and encourage women to achieve these one step at a time
2. Talk through what areas women would like control over in their cervical smear e.g. agree a safe word
3. Help women plan exactly when/where they will attend
4. Share techniques such as mindfulness and relaxation breathing for women to use during their cervical smear

With thanks to Katherine Madden for the undertaking of this important study, [Understanding the relationship between sexual assault and cervical smear uptake](#), Madden, K (2018).