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## New Research Finds Child Sexual Abuse Cases Languish In Criminal Justice System

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**EDITORS AND REPORTERS:** UNH researcher Wendy Walsh can be reached for interviews at 603-862-1026 and [wendy.walsh@unh.edu](mailto:wendy.walsh@unh.edu). The full study is available for download at <http://cmx.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/1/3>.

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DURHAM, N.H. - New research from the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center finds that child sexual abuse cases in the criminal justice system take an unusually long time to be prosecuted and resolved. This is concerning because a prolonged court process has been shown to be detrimental to a child victim's recovery and ongoing mental health.

According to the study, over half of all cases took more than a year from indictment to conclusion with a third of cases taking more than two years or were still pending unresolved after two years. The American Bar Association says the standard time for felony prosecutions should be about six months, a deadline that was met by just 20 percent of the cases.

The research conducted by Wendy Walsh, research assistant professor of sociology at the center, is presented in the February 2008 issue of *Child Maltreatment* in the article titled "How Long to Prosecute Child Sexual Abuse for a Community Using a Children's Advocacy Center and Two Comparison Communities?" The study analyzed a sample of 160 cases of child sexual abuse in three communities served by the Dallas County District Attorney in Dallas, Texas.

"We may be finding and prosecuting more child molesters, but if we drag victims through months of anxious waiting, we are not providing true justice for children. Children can't really begin to recover fully until the court process is over," Walsh said.

Walsh notes that in a national survey, prosecutors attributed the delays to the special demands of child sexual abuse cases such as preparing child victims for testimony and obtaining full disclosure of all incidents. Another factor mentioned was the strategy by defense attorneys to file motions to prolong the process, which is seen as making a conviction less likely.

"We can do better than this," Walsh said. She urged judges, prosecutors and police to make these cases a priority, to set and meet deadlines for each phase of each case, and to track and publish the amount time it takes to prosecute cases in various jurisdictions.

"If the media and the public knew how long these cases were taking, it might provide the kind of accountability that would speed things up," she said.

Walsh conducted her research with Tonya Lippert with CARES NW in Portland, Oregon,

Theodore P. Cross with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Danielle M. Maurice at Brandeis University, and Karen S. Davison at the University of Denver.

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