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UNH Launches New Center Focused On Preventing Sexual Violence On University Campuses

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UNH Launches New Center Focused On Preventing Sexual Violence On University Campuses

Prevention Innovations Is First Center Of Its Kind In The Nation

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DURHAM, N.H. -- College-age women are at a higher risk of becoming victims of sexual violence than at nearly any other time in their lives. According to the Department of Justice, women between the ages of 16 and 24 are victims of sexual assault at a rate that is four times higher than all women.

A new research center at the University of New Hampshire aims to change those statistics through research of sexual violence on campuses, evaluation of prevention programs and policies at the nation's universities, and education and training regarding the best ways to prevent sexual and intimate partner violence.

Prevention Innovations: Research and Practices for Ending Violence Against Women on Campus recently was launched as a multidisciplinary center that includes faculty from the sociology and psychology departments as well as representatives from the Sexual Harassment And Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP) and Women's Studies Program. The center's clients include colleges, universities, local governmental agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

"Being college age puts women at a substantially increased risk of becoming a victim of sexual violence," says Vicki Banyard, associate professor of psychology and co-director of the center. "Most risk factors are related to the larger environment in which 18 to 24-year-olds reside, including social scenes like parties that perpetrators use to their advantage and the fact that peers have a great influence on behavior."

The center's hallmark project is Bringing In the Bystander, which emphasizes that everyone has a role to play in ending violence against women on campus. Both the intervention program and outreach campaign have proven to increase community members' knowledge about proactive bystander behaviors. The project has received funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, and evaluation of the Bystander Intervention Program was funded by the National Institute of Justice.

"The bystander focus is not victim blaming. This message of the community role in reducing violence against women is extremely important for engaging both men and women. Prior research finds that when prevention programs focus on men as potential perpetrators and

women as potential victims, there is resistance to the prevention program as men and women become defensive toward their assigned roles," says Sharyn Potter, associate professor of sociology and co-director of the center.

According to the researchers, bystanders should be very cognizant of their personal safety and assess the situation before intervening. They should only step in if their safety will not be jeopardized and enlist others to intervene, as well. Ways to step in include taking a friend home or out of the potentially dangerous situation, calling a residential hall assistant, the police, or 911.

Other projects at the center include:

- **Consultation on Prevention and Crisis Intervention on Campus:** The center provides information, consultation and technical assistance to help postsecondary institutions develop and implement model policies, procedures and programs on issues relating to violence against women on campus.
- **NH Campus Consortium:** The center provides technical assistance to the consortium and consortium members. The NH Campus Consortium creates a forum where New Hampshire's postsecondary institutions can develop and implement strategies to end violence against women on their respective campuses. The project is funded by the NH Department of Justice.
- **NH Statewide Sexual Assault Survey:** In collaboration with the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and the NH Department of Health and Human Services, the center is conducting a statewide survey on sexual assault prevalence, consequences and service effectiveness.
- **Unwanted Sexual Experiences Study:** The center is part of an interdisciplinary group of faculty who has conducted a study of unwanted sexual experiences on the UNH campus.