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DURHAM, N.H. -- Only 20 percent of the children who suffered a serious sexual or physical assault received professional counseling in the year following the crime, according to a new study by University of New Hampshire researchers published this week in the international journal, Child Abuse and Neglect.

That is very unfortunate, conclude Kathy Kopiec, David Finkelhor and Janis Wolak, of UNH's Crimes against Children Research Center, because considerable evidence links crime victimization in childhood to later emotional and behavioral problems both in childhood and adulthood.

Many of these problems are clearly preventable, the researchers say, because clinically proven, effective mental health treatments for child crime victims do exist. The main problem is that child victims do not get connected to these treatments.

Based on their national study, the researchers suggest ways to make it more likely child victims get counseling. For example, families in their study were more likely to seek counseling if someone had advised them to do so. Thus, the researchers believe all kinds of professionals, including police, teachers and family doctors, should actively promote counseling in the wake of crime victimizations.

Families in the UNH study also sometimes failed to consider counseling because they thought mental health professionals would be unlikely to take their child's victimization seriously, suggesting a need for counselors and counseling agencies to make more effort to publicize their concern about victimization and their receptivity to juvenile victims.

Families in the UNH study also were less likely to seek counseling for child victims if they did not have health insurance. The researchers say this is additional evidence of the need to reduce the number of uninsured children in the country and to make sure that treatment for victimization is included in all coverage.

The study was based on telephone calls to a nationally representative sample of more than 16,000 households from which 157 families were identified as having a child who had experienced a serious crime victimization in the past year.