

## Media Relations

# UNH Crimes Against Children Research Center Awarded \$400K To Investigate Experiences Of Child Crime Victims

October 7, 2010

DURHAM, N.H. – The Crimes against Children Research Center of the University of New Hampshire has been awarded \$400,572 from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to research the experiences of children and caregivers who have been exposed to family violence in interacting with the social services staff and law enforcement. The grant was part of U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder’s new Defending Childhood Initiative and one of only two grants awarded by NIJ to address issues relating to children’s witnessing family violence.

The study is the first to gather in-depth information about a nationally representative sample of children exposed to family violence. It will include a large proportion of children whose exposure is unknown to police or any authority, and will compare and contrast the experiences of such children with others whose exposure is reported. It also will focus on understanding the effects of justice system interactions that can be readily changed, such as the actions that police take or the kinds of agencies children have contact with.

“This study will have important, direct relevance to develop justice policy. For example, if children of a certain age feel more positive and show less distress when police or other agency staff spend time talking to and working directly with them, then this would encourage the development of more such practices,” says Heather Turner, professor of sociology at UNH and co-principal investigator of the project.

“If children feel more negatively and show greater distress when they witness family members being arrested and/or handcuffed, this may encourage law enforcement to shield children from such exposures,” she says.

The study will provide three important, and currently unavailable, perspectives for helping to develop justice policy:





- What is the present experience that children have with the justice system and agency response to situations of child exposure to family violence in a national perspective?
- How do the families and children feel about and evaluate these justice system responses?
- Are there types of exposures that appear to be associated with more or less child distress, and does police or other agency contact influence these associations?

The study also will provide important benchmarks for establishing priorities and tracking change.

“For example, if the time delay in responding to calls for police assistance exceeds 30 minutes for a substantial fraction of the families, this would suggest the importance of promoting more prompt response, and allow future studies to note if improvement occurs,” Turner says.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence against children. Visit the center online at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html>.

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