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UNH Tackles Public Health Issues for College Students: Sexual Assault and Problem Drinking

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DURHAM, N.H. – Researchers at the University of New Hampshire’s Prevention Innovations Research Center received a three-year grant from the National Institutes of Health to evaluate an innovative strategy to keep on-campus incidents of intimate partner violence or sexual assault from leading to problem drinking and/or mental health issues, such as depression.

While research shows that a negative reaction (like not believing the victim) to a disclosure of intimate partner violence or sexual assault often leads to negative outcomes, no intervention to date has been developed and evaluated specific to recipients of a disclosure.

“This grant will allow us to test an intervention we’ve developed,” said Katie Edwards, principal investigator and associate professor of psychology and women’s studies. “We believe that by providing people with information on why positive reactions (like emotional support) are important as well as examples of what to say and what not to say and ample opportunity for skill building will make a significant difference for victims.”

College students were chosen as the target population due to the high rates of intimate partner violence, sexual assault and problem drinking among that population. “If shown to be effective, the intervention could be adapted and implemented in a variety of settings,” said Edwards.

This research is supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number R34AA024849. Edwards’ project team includes curriculum development specialist Caroline Leyva (UNH) and co-investigators Sarah Ullman (University of Illinois Chicago), Lindsey Rodriguez (University of South Florida, St. Petersburg) and Christina Dardis (Towson University). A number of UNH undergraduate and graduate students will also serve as project staff.

The University of New Hampshire is a flagship research university that inspires innovation and transforms lives in our state, nation and world. More than 16,000 students from all 50 states and 71 countries engage with an award-winning faculty in top ranked programs in business, engineering, law, health and human services, liberal arts and the sciences across more than 200 programs of study. UNH’s research portfolio includes partnerships with NASA, NOAA, NSF and NIH, receiving more than \$100 million in competitive external funding every year to further explore and define the frontiers of land, sea and space.

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