



# Unwanted Sexual Experiences at UNH:

## Use of Services after Unwanted Sexual Experiences

• 2006 •

### Introduction, Methods and Sample

This is the fourth in a series of reports from data collected in 2006 on unwanted sexual experiences at UNH. This report focuses on the use of services after incidents of unwanted sexual experiences. The study is the result of an ongoing research collaboration at the University of New Hampshire funded by the UNH Office of the President; data have been collected three times beginning in 1988 (1988, 2000, 2006). In 2006, we collected information from students at the end of February and asked questions about unwanted sexual contact or intercourse that had occurred since the beginning of the fall semester of that academic year. Approximately half of the sample (N=1242) completed paper surveys in a random sample of UNH undergraduate courses across colleges. The other half (N=1163) completed a web-based survey. This report is based on data from the paper survey.

### Use of Services

Participants who reported unwanted sexual contact (15%) or unwanted sexual intercourse (4%) were asked whether they had used any services after the incident. Services included the Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP), police, affirmative action, judicial programs, counseling center, Health Services, academic advisor, RA or hall director, or Campus Ministry. Participants were also asked if, since they had been at UNH, a friend ever told them that she/he had been the victim of an unwanted sexual experience. A follow-up question asked about the friend's use of services after the incident.

**Victims' Use of Services:** Very few victims of unwanted sexual contact reported using any services. In fact, 97% of those who responded to the service use questions (N=162) reported they did not use any services. Of the few victims of unwanted contact who did report using services, two contacted SHARPP, one contacted the police, two used Health Services, two talked to an RA or hall director, one spoke with someone at Campus Ministry. Similarly, 94% of victims of unwanted intercourse (N= 35) said they did not use any of the list of campus services

with only two victims using SHARPP and one using Health Services.

**Friends' Use of Services:** Twenty-nine percent of the students reported that a friend had disclosed to them that they had been the victim of an unwanted sexual experience. When asked about the friend's use of services, 71% reported that their friends did not use any services. Only 15% reported that their friend used SHARPP, and 13% said their friend used services other than SHARPP.

**Likely Use of Services:** Finally, participants also answered questions about whether they would use a list of various campus services if they had an unwanted sexual experience in the future. Interestingly, over half thought they would be likely or very likely to use SHARPP (58%), and a majority thought they would contact the police (74%). Additionally, 58% thought they would use the Counseling Center and 78% said it was likely or very likely they would use Health Services. The majority said it was not at all likely that they would use judicial programs, Affirmative Action Office, their academic advisor, Residential Life, Campus Ministry, or an off-campus crisis center. The difference between what students say they might do in terms of service use and what victims actually report doing is striking as are gender differences – with men reporting that they would be less likely to access these services than women.

### Reasons For Not Using Services

Reasons for not using services mirrored reasons for not disclosing (see report 3 in this series) and the categories are not mutually exclusive (see Table 1). In particular a large percentage of those experiencing unwanted sexual contact indicated that they didn't think it was serious enough to talk about (70%) and 40% indicated that they felt that it was a private matter. A notable minority, however, did express concerns about being believed (8%) or blamed (12%) or fearing retribution from the perpetrator (9%). For unwanted intercourse, victims noted that their shame and embarrassment kept them from seeking services (50%), In addition, 73% felt it was a private matter, and 48%



**Table 1: Reasons for Not Using Services (In Percentages)**

<b>Reasons for not using service</b>	<b>Unwanted contact victims (n=127)*</b>	<b>Unwanted intercourse victims (n=26)*</b>	<b>Friend did not use SHARPP (n=253)*</b>	<b>Friend did not use other service (n=154)*</b>
Felt it was private matter	40%	73%	82%	69%
Didn't think incident serious	70	48	68	61
Ashamed/embarrassed	16	50	56	46
Concerned others would find out	10	39	43	33
Hard to trust stranger to help	11	29	32	29
Didn't want perpetrator to get in trouble	9	33	30	23
Fear of being blamed	12	23	28	25
Fear of retribution from perpetrator	9	20	27	25
Thought people would tell them what to do	11	20	26	21
Fear of not being believed	8	30	24	20
Would feel like admission of failure	8	16	17	18
Felt staff wouldn't understand	6	19	10	11

\*There is missing data of various amounts for each variable so the N is lower than this for some items.

didn't think the incident was serious enough to use services. Indeed, all of the responses to this array of items were more pronounced for unwanted intercourse – with a third of victims concerned that they would not be believed and 1 in 4 fearing that they would be blamed for the incident.

The pattern of responses for friends not using services is very similar to that of victims of unwanted sexual intercourse. Students report that friends who have disclosed an unwanted sexual experience do not use services for a range of reasons, including privacy, shame, and fear that others would find out about the incident. The largest difference in the patterns is that 68% report that the friend did not consider the incident serious, a finding that is closer to the victim reports for contact (70%) than for intercourse (48%).

## Conclusions and Recommendations:

It is noteworthy that victims of unwanted sexual experiences rarely use campus services put into place to serve them. We need to have a greater understanding about why this is the case. For example, while many victims checked the item indicating “not serious enough,” we do not know if this is because out of the list of stresses college students face, studying for exams, etc., they did not prioritize this experience or if they indeed did not perceive harm from the incident. We know that given social norms that often blame victims and excuse perpetrators that people are often reluctant to acknowledge and label unwanted sexual experiences. Many research studies find that few victims actually label their experiences as sexual assault. Victims may also feel that the community would not label their experience as serious or warranting attention. Thus, they may sweep their experiences under the rug and try to ignore the incident. We know little about what percentage of these students then show up in other campus offices with trouble concentrating, physical illnesses,

etc., that may be linked to their unwanted sexual experiences but where that connection is not made by the students or the campus officials. Much further research on such questions is indicated.

Given that this report shows that even students who reported being a victim of the more intrusive and serious unwanted intercourse were reluctant to use services, much needs to be done to educate the campus community about the value of seeking services after such an incident. We need to continue to study perceptions of campus services and how community members would prefer to learn about and access such services. We need to find innovative and effective ways to make community members more comfortable accessing these services and dispel unwarranted myths and stereotypes that may interfere with access to them. Such next steps will broaden and strengthen the safety nets for victims.

## Project collaborators

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