

### Abstract

Research shows that PTSD and problem drinking are common, sequelae experienced by women victims of adult sexual assault. The proposed project builds on the PI's prior research by testing a theoretical model of the prospective effects of general social support and assault-specific social support (i.e., social reactions' to disclosures, perceived helpfulness of disclosing, victims' satisfaction with support) received by sexual assault victims on their coping and behavioral responses as well as post-assault adjustment, including PTSD, problem drinking, and positive adaptation (i.e., posttraumatic growth, life satisfaction), which is a novel aspect of this project. Approximately **1,832** women who (a) experienced either attempted or completed rape and (b) disclosed their experience to at least **1 informal** support provider will be recruited from the local community, universities, and victim service agencies to **complete a series of 4 mail surveys, distributed at 6-month intervals over the course of 2 years.** Receiving less general social support and having negative assault-specific social support experiences (i.e., receiving negative social reactions to disclosures, perceiving disclosure as unhelpful, being dissatisfied with support provided) are expected to relate to greater maladaptive coping (i.e., drinking to cope with distress, self-blame, avoidance coping) and behavioral (i.e., sexual risk-taking) responses, fewer adaptive coping (i.e., support seeking, approach coping, perceived control over recovery) and behavioral (i.e., sexual assertiveness) responses, which in turn are expected to predict more symptoms of PTSD and problem drinking as well as less positive adaptation (i.e., posttraumatic growth, life satisfaction). In contrast, receiving less general social support and having positive assault-specific social support experiences (i.e., receiving positive social reactions to disclosures, perceiving disclosure as helpful, and being satisfied with support provided) are expected to relate to greater adaptive coping and behavioral responses, fewer maladaptive coping and behavioral responses, fewer symptoms of PTSD and problem drinking, and more positive adaptation. We also propose to examine whether victims' social support experiences influence their risk for experiencing subsequent sexual victimization or other traumas, either directly or indirectly through effects on coping and behavioral responses and post-assault adjustment. We will also examine how sexual assaults or other traumatic events that occur during the course of the study influence women's subsequent coping and behavioral responses and post-assault adjustment. We will examine for the first time whether these processes differ for victims of alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related sexual assaults. We expect that drinking-related variables (i.e., alcohol-specific social reactions, drinking to cope with distress) will increase the ability to predict post-assault adjustment in victims of alcohol-related assaults specifically. Also, we expected assault-specific social support to have a stronger effect on coping and behavioral responses, risk for revictimization or other traumas, and post-assault adjustment in victims of alcohol-related assaults who disclosed that alcohol was involved in their assaults compared to other victims. Finally, in addition to completing mail surveys, a subset of victims and informal support sources they told about the assault will be invited to be interviewed separately in greater depth about their disclosure experiences. These interviews will yield a new understanding of the processes of receiving and giving social support and its effects on victims' coping and behavioral responses and post-assault adjustment, and whether such relations are moderated by the involvement of alcohol during victims' assaults.

### Project Narrative - Relevance

Sexual assault is a serious public health issue that affects approximately 25% of American women (Bachar & Koss, 2001; Russell & Bolen, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). This crime

can result in both physical injuries and psychological symptoms, including PTSD and alcohol abuse problems (Foa & Riggs, 1993; Resick, 1993). The proposed longitudinal study examines how women's experiences of general and assault-specific social support relate to their coping and behavioral responses and post-assault adjustment over time. Second, we propose to examine the influence of women's experiences of social support on risk for revictimization or other traumatic events, and whether relations between these factors are mediated by women's coping and behavioral responses and post-assault adjustment. Third, we will examine how revictimization and other traumas influence women's subsequent coping and behavioral responses, and post-assault adjustment. Third, we will compare these processes in victims of alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related sexual assaults. Finally, qualitative data gleaned from interviews with victims and an informal support provider will further inform our understanding of how social support influences victims' post-assault adjustment and whether there are differences as a function of whether alcohol was involved in the assault. Such information can inform the development of specialized -interventions to improve sexual assault victims' recovery, tailored specifically to victims of alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related sexual assaults.