

media release

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Rethinking anti-rape education for young people: we need your help

Promoting non-violent relationships between young people is the focus of a new research project underway at the University of Western Sydney.

The University of Western Sydney in partnership with the NSW Rape Crisis Centre is carrying out the three-year project, funded by a \$135,000 Australian Research Council grant.

Chief researcher, Associate Professor Moira Carmody, from the University's Social Justice Social Change Research Centre, has spent the past 20 years working on the issue of sexual assault prevention and says that despite ongoing education programs, sexual violence remains a very real problem among men and women aged 16-25 years.

"A large amount of money and goodwill is invested in anti-violence education programs but design and outcomes are often poor. The evaluations of rape education programs indicate there is a pressing need to develop anti-rape education strategies that move beyond the limited focus to date," she says.

The study aims to bring together research on young people and their experiences of sexual intimacy and other research based on sexual assault prevention.

"Sex can be fun but sometimes it is hard for young people to work out if and when they want to have sex and who with. Working out how to enjoy sexual intimacy and being safe is really important. We know young people have lots of ideas about these issues, but are rarely asked," says Associate Professor Carmody.

The study will focus on young men and women aged 16-25 years – the key age group in which most sexual assault occurs.

"Young women aged 16 to 25 are most at risk of sexual assault and if men commit sexual violence they are most likely to do it between 16 and 25 years of age. This project will focus on young people in that age group," she says.

Associate Professor Carmody is hoping to recruit young men and women aged 16-25 years from three Sydney areas – the northern beaches, inner city Sydney and Penrith to take part in the unique study. Later the project will interview young people in rural areas.

"We are really keen to talk to young people about how they negotiate sex and dating and what knowledge and skills *they* think would help them avoid sexual assault," she says.

Associate Professor Carmody argues that the kind of knowledge and the skills needed to learn negotiation in intimate relationships is absent from most Australian rape prevention education programs.

“Current programs too often reinforce traditional ideas about male and female behaviour and focus almost exclusively on the unethical behaviour of men and completely avoid how same sex attracted young people work out these issues,” she says.

“Most programs are based on a punitive education model. They tell people ‘rape is bad’, and expect people will change their behaviour. Many programs focus on women and at risk groups, yet ignore men.”

“Our goal is to educate young women and men about how to prevent sexual violence and promote their ability to enjoy safe and pleasurable sexual intimacy, live healthy, productive and fulfilling lives.”

The information gathered from this part of the study will be used to develop a prevention education program that will be used across NSW.

The second stage of the study will involve interviewing participants before and after they participate in the program and then six months later to determine what impact the program has had on how they think and behave in relationships.

Young people living in Sydney’s Northern Beaches, inner city or Penrith areas interested in taking part in the research should email sexualethics@uws.edu.au or phone 02 4736 0175. The research team are also interested in hearing from community organisations working with young people.

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