

## The Relationship Between Sexually Coercive Experience Frequency, Coping, Social Support and Sexual and Mental Health in Adult Women

Allison K. Muzzey<sup>1</sup>, Devon J. Hensel<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Women's Studies, IU School of Liberal Arts; <sup>2</sup>Section of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, IU School of Medicine; <sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, IU School of Liberal Arts

**Introduction:** Existing literature separately identifies social support and coping methods as mediating influences between sexual coercion and adverse health outcomes, yet few empirical studies actually evaluate their influence in the same model. The objective of this study was to analyze how adult women's coping methods and social support jointly mediate the impact of sexually coercive experience on sexual and mental health.

**Methods:** Data are drawn from a larger internet-based, cross-sectional survey examining adult men's and women's health and life experiences. For the current study, we retained all female participants (N=113). Structural equation modelling (SEM) (Stata, v. 22; all  $p < .05$ ) analyzed the hypothesized structural relationships between coping (adaptive and maladaptive), social support (subjective and emotional), sexual coercion, sexual health (sexual openness, sexual anxiety, sexual esteem, and sexual entitlement) and mental health (depression, self-esteem, and anxiety).

**Results:** More frequent sexual coercion predicted higher maladaptive coping ( $\beta = .364$ ). Higher levels of maladaptive coping were associated with higher levels of depression ( $\beta = .199$ ), anxiety ( $\beta = .393$ ), sexual anxiety ( $\beta = .346$ ), and sexual openness ( $\beta = .251$ ). Additionally, higher levels of maladaptive coping were associated with lower self-esteem ( $\beta = -.226$ ). Adaptive coping and social support were not associated with sexual coercion.

**Conclusion:** Adult women's sexually coercive experiences impact sexual and mental health indirectly through maladaptive coping, but not through adaptive coping or any social support. Our data raise the possibility that maladaptive coping could be an important catalyst for poor mental and sexual health outcomes following a sexually coercive experience. From an education and policy perspective, this means that a focus on reducing maladaptive coping methods may increase mental and sexual health and reduce the likelihood of accruing more sexually coercive experiences.

**Mentor:** Devon J. Hensel, Section of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, IU School of Medicine; Department of Sociology, IU School of Liberal Arts