The Importance of Social Support to Survivors of Sexual Assault: A College Student Sample

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27.7 per 1,000 women experience sexual assault during their college careers (Fischer, 2000). Past researchers have discovered that if a person thinks they have social support during a highly stressful time, they have less depression (Talley, 2010). When specifically looking at survivors of sexual assault who disclose to a friend, those who receive a positive and supporting reaction were at less of a risk of developing long term mental implications (Sabina, 2014). Having supportive friends also helped the survivors to heal more successfully than those who received negative reactions (Guerette, 2014). The current study examined 468 students from The Center for Collegiate Mental Health, a national sample of students who seek treatment at college counseling centers. For the analyses, only those who had been sexually assaulted within the last year were selected. A negative correlation was predicted between individuals who have high social support and lower depression at initial appointment. Furthermore, those who had higher social support would report a greater change in depression score over therapy. Spearman’s rho correlations were conducted. It was found that there was a negative correlation between friend support and depression ($r_s = -.355, p < .01$) at initial appointment and a positive correlation between having friend support and change in depression during therapy ($r_s = .139, p < .01$). What can be concluded from the analyses is that people who have high social support after a sexual assault come into treatment with lower depression but experience smaller change over therapy. Treatment implications will be discussed.