

UO study looks at who believes sex abuse claims

Young men who have never been traumatized are the least likely group to believe a person's recounting of child sexual abuse, according to research at the University of Oregon.

The study also finds that men with highly sexist beliefs tend to believe that such incidents, if they happened at all, did not harm the victim.

Researchers divided 318 university students into groups based on self-reporting of abuse history and sexist attitudes.

The students heard short vignettes in which abuse victims described incidents that occurred at age 9 involving an adult figure. Each victim also reported whether the memory has been present since the incident or was recently recalled.

Women — both those who had and had not suffered from some kind of betrayal of adult trust — and men who had experienced such betrayal were willing to believe the allegations, especially in the cases in which memory had always been present.

There was a dramatic decline in believability for men with no abuse history. "I was surprised that this was such a big effect, and that there was such a difference between males and females," said Jennifer Freyd, a UO psychology professor.

Freyd said the findings suggest that educational efforts may need to be more heavily focused toward men to help them understand that such acts do occur and that the abuse often can contribute to a number of societal ills.

The findings are in the March issue of the journal *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.