

Researchers Examine Differential Perceptions of a Hypothetical Sexual Assault Survivor Based on Race and Ethnicity

A team of researchers from the [Arnold School of Public Health](#) at the University of South Carolina have completed a study examining differential perceptions of a hypothetical sexual assault survivor based on race and ethnicity. The resulting paper, which was published in the [Journal of American College Health](#), explores victim responsibility, trauma, and need for social support. The study was led by [Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior](#) (HPEB) Ph.D. graduate [Kaleea Lewis](#).

In this study, Dr. Lewis and her colleagues explored the ways in which a sample of college women interpret racially/ethnically coded vignettes. Their goal was to better understand the women's perceptions of responsibility and trauma experienced by a hypothetical female sexual assault survivor and her need for social support.

Participants included a convenience sample of 51 women attending a large, predominantly white university in the Southeastern United States in 2013. The women were randomly assigned one of three vignettes describing a hypothetical date rape scenario, with the vignettes being identical except for discrete statements coded to signify an African American, Latina, or white female student.

The researchers then conducted a qualitative analysis on participants' responses to open-ended questions that gauged their interpretations of responsibility, trauma, and social support.

"Our analysis revealed six overarching themes, including overt victim blaming/shaming, justification of the sexual assault, and perceived need for social support," Dr. Lewis says. "These findings point to the significance of including race in discussions about and programs that address sexual assault on college campuses to ensure that all women who experience sexual violence receive the support that they need."