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## **Understanding the Impact of Sexual Assault and Developing Skills to Interview Survivors**

In a recent study of the factors that influence a prosecutor's decision to charge in a sexual assault case, researchers validated what many experienced investigators already know – that charging decisions are primarily, if not exclusively, determined by the victim's perceived character and her behavior at the time of the assault.<sup>1</sup> We could conclude on this basis that law enforcement should just give up thoroughly investigating difficult cases and focus only on those cases where the victim has an untarnished moral character and impeccable behavior at the time of the assault. To the contrary, this study shows the importance of good police investigation and the crucial role that police have in corroborating the victim's allegations by conducting and documenting thorough victim interviews.

At the conclusions of the session, participants will be able to:

- Prepare for a successful victim interview
- Identify ways to build trust and cooperation with the victim
- Conduct an effective preliminary interview with a victim of sexual assault by
  - Using techniques to encourage the victim to tell her story in an uninterrupted narrative
  - Effectively using follow-up questions to elicit additional information
  - Learning procedures for concluding the interview
- Understand how by overcoming challenges to the victim's credibility and corroborating every possible aspect of her story, police can make the case "prosecutable" and at the same time facilitate rapport and cooperation
- Recognize inappropriate police responses and potential barriers to effective victim interviews
- Determine an appropriate interview location and who should be present
- Have a better understanding of how to recreate and document a victim's reality of a sexual assault
- Evaluate common sexual assault scenarios and the way they are often inappropriately interpreted and documented
- Identify the difference between the language of consensual and non-consensual sex

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<sup>1</sup> Spears & Spohn, Justice Quarterly, Vol. 14 (No. 3) September, 1997