



A little help for young couples in making the right sexual choices

A RESEARCHER from the University of Western Sydney has developed a new sexuality and sexual assault prevention program that will give young people the skills to protect themselves in dating situations.

As part of a four year study, Associate Professor Moira Carmody from the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre at UWS interviewed men and women aged 16-25 years from rural and city areas.

The findings, contained in a new *Sex and Ethics* book pack released in Sydney, reveal young people want to learn skills to communicate with their partners effectively and

have ethical sex, but feel there is little opportunity to explore these issues at school or with their families.

"More than 30 per cent of young women who took part in the study had experienced pressure from partners to have sex when they didn't want to," Associate Prof Carmody said.

"This involved manipulation such as 'if you love me you will have sex', through to ignoring non-verbal and verbal indications of uncertainty or refusal, and even using physical force."

According to Associate Prof Carmody, there is a common, incorrect assumption on behalf of young people and others that most sexual assault is commit-

ted by strangers.

"This is why it is so important for young people to understand that sexual assault can occur within dating relationships and learn the skills to prevent these unwanted sexual experiences," she said.

The *Sex and Ethics* pack contains a comprehensive six week education program that aims to provide young people with a framework of sexual ethics.

Associate Prof Carmody said the aim of the education program is to encourage ethical, respectful, non-abusive and mutually enjoyable sex between young people in casual or ongoing relationships.

"Using role plays and case

studies, the program helps young people to practise negotiating their sexual needs and learn how to deal with conflicting desires and needs," she said.

"While the program doesn't tell them what they should do within their relationships, it does provide them with the skills to make ethical choices."

The education program was rigorously evaluated during the research phase and was found to have a lasting impact on the behaviour of both young men and women, with 82 per cent still using ideas learnt in the group six months later and 74 per cent putting the skills into practice.