The National Center for Victims of Crime is pleased to provide the slides used in our March 26, 2014 Webinar, “Enhancing Sexual Assault Investigations Through Culture Change.”

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Enhancing Sexual Assault Investigations Through Culture Change

Houston Police Department
Our Mission

To forge a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives.
National Center for Victims of Crime

- Advocacy to secure resources, rights, and protections for victims.

- Training and technical assistance.
Project goal:

- to ensure that communities have the tools to create a victim-sensitive approach to sexual assault kit backlog reduction.
OVW SAK Backlog TTA Project Overview

- Victim Roundtable and Interviews
  - Report available online
- Online Resource Library
  - Policies and protocols on notification
  - State and Federal laws, pending legislation
  - Reports and resources
- Provide Technical Assistance
- Webinar Series
Upcoming Webinar

- April 2nd, 1:00 PM (ET). **Untested Rape Kits: the Issue, the Impact, and the Response.** Join Natasha Alexenko, founder of Natasha’s Justice Project and Rebecca O’Conner with RAINN, to learn develop an understanding of the untested rape kit issue in the U.S.

- April 25th, 2:00 PM (ET). **Into the Lab: Mandatory Sexual Assault Kit Testing.** Join Cara Smith and Torie Camp as they discuss the Illinois and Texas laws mandating testing of sexual assault kits.
Thank you!

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Enhancing Sexual Assault Investigations Through Culture Change

A Case Study

Houston Police Department
Presentation for
The National Center For Victims of Crime
Thank you to Ilse Knecht, Torie Camp, and The National Center for Victims of Crime!
Today’s Presenters:

- **Mary Lentschke**
  - Assistant Chief, East Command
  - *Formerly Captain of Special Crimes Division*

- **Shamara Garner**
  - Lieutenant, Adult Sex Crimes Unit

- **Belinda Null**
  - Lieutenant, Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit

- **Emily Burton-Blank, LMSW**
  - Justice Advocate, Adult Sex Crimes Unit
In conjunction with the National Institute of Justice, the Houston Sexual Assault Kit Task Force Team and the Houston Police Department are honored to share their actions and findings obtained through a multi-disciplinary approach to the issue of sexual assault and its related investigative and evidence based responses.
Housekeeping
- Note on Language
- Note on Slides
Learning Objectives

- Discuss the investigative transformation from a traditional investigative focus to a victim-centered law enforcement response (Cultural Change)

- Discuss Investigative Enhancements designed to improve evidence based responses for investigation.

- Discuss Cornerstone Strategies that were implemented for the specific purpose of directly assisting the victim in the law enforcement process.
City of Houston: Context

- 4th largest city in the US
  - Metro Houston area: 5.9 million people
  - Harris County: 4 million people
- Most ethnically diverse city in US
  - 90+ languages represented

Houston Police Department

- Approximately 5,000 officers and 2,000 civilians
- 15 Patrol substations, 26 storefronts


SAK Task Force:

Background

HPD Sex Crimes Organizational Structure

- Investigative Operation Command
  - Special Crimes Division
    - Sex Crimes Unit (17 years of age and older)
  - Juvenile Division
    - Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit (Under 17 years of age)
SAK Task Force: Background

Houston untested SAKs: 6,600

NIJ Grant, 2011

- Action Research to Develop Strategic Practices for Investigations and Prosecutions of Sexual Assault
  - Houston, Texas
  - Wayne County, Detroit, Michigan

City of Houston, 2013

- Additional funding to analyze all untested SAK
- Analysis of all kits to be concluded Summer 2014
SAK Task Force:
Background

Multi-Disciplinary Approach

- HPD Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit
- HPD Property Room
- HPD Adult Sex Crimes Unit
- Crime Lab
- Harris County District Attorney’s Office
- National Institute of Justice
- Harris Health System
- The University of Texas at Austin Inst on Dom. Violence & Sexual Assault
- Bureau of Business Research
- Memorial Hermann Health System
- Sam Houston State University College of Criminal Justice
- Houston Area Women’s Center
Houston NIJ Grant Project Goals:

- Understand the problem of untested sexual assault kits
- Understand the manner in which forensic evidence is used
- Determine how evidence can be more meaningful
- Design a response strategy to eliminate the backlog of untested sexual assault kits
Examined the issues:

- Cases where sexual assault kits were untested
  - Case characteristics
  - Level of engagement by the complainant
  - Investigator decision-making
  - Prosecutorial outcomes: Charges filed? Why or why not?
  - Advocate involvement in the case

- Crime Lab procedures

- HPD Property Room procedures

- Hospital evidence collection procedures
Examination led to more systemic questions:

- How did we get here?
- Are we doing everything we can?
- How can we be more effective?
- How can we provide more compassion for the victim?
- Are we providing the highest level of customer service to the victim and the community?
To address those questions, we reviewed the following:

- Mission and purpose for sexual assault investigations

- Reviewed our current first responder responsibilities related to sexual assault calls

- Examined sexual assault case investigation practices
  - Reviewed case management system
  - Reviewed investigative policies, procedures, practices
  - Reviewed evidence collection policies, procedures, practices
  - Reviewed statistical analysis abilities to capture information
  - Identified strengths and weaknesses
Review led to the identification of new strategic direction designed to answer the following question:

As a law enforcement organization, how can we enhance our abilities to deliver the most effective and meaningful response to victims of sexual assault and the community?

New focus:

Establishing a foundation for a victim-centered approach to sexual assault investigations.
What Enhancements Did We Make To Our Service Response?
Re-focused Mission and Purpose

- “Every complainant matters”
  - All cases are assigned to an investigator
  - Eliminated suspension of cases with no leads

- “One voice, one message”
  - Consistency in leadership
  - Consistency in messaging
  - Accountability of actions
  - Support from top level commanders
Improved Evidentiary Processes

- Tweaked evidence submission slips
- Collection of sexual assault kit procedures – streamlined
- Property room actions related to sexual assault evidence

Improved Communication

- Juvenile and Adult Sex Crimes Unit investigators / managers
- Crime Lab and investigators / managers
- SANE nurses and investigators / managers
- Hospital personnel and investigators / managers
- Advocates and investigators / managers
- District Attorney’s Office and investigators / managers
Adult Sex Crimes Unit

Process/Procedure Shifts

- **Modification of case management system**
  - Replaced manual and paper case assignments
  - All cases assigned electronically within 24 hours

- **Moved victim waiting area**
  - From an open central entry/waiting area
  - To a separate, more private entry/waiting area
Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Cont.

Investigative Strategies
- From traditional investigations to victim-centered investigations
- Elimination of “cubicle investigations”
- Investigation no longer predicated upon victim providing a sworn, written statement

Case Review Strategies
- Two levels of review – sergeant, lieutenant
- Strict adherence to investigative strategies
- Ensure victim focus and evidenced-based investigation
Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Cont.

Received Additional Training
- Neurobiology of Trauma – Rebecca Campbell
- NCVC Webinars
- Attend conferences: End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), Crimes Against Women, Crimes Against Children

Provided Additional Training
- Met with advocates from across the city
- Presentations for SANEs and medical professionals
- Presented at conferences
Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit

Background

- Partner with Children’s Assessment Center (CAC)
  - Forensic interviews
  - Medical clinic
  - Social services
  - Therapy
- Video all interviews
- Direct access to prosecutors specializing in Child Abuse

Primary Enhancement

- Communication with Adult Sex Crimes Unit & Crime Lab personnel
- Additional training, including DNA 101 (HPD Crime Lab)
Cornerstone Enhancements:

- Addition of Justice Advocate Position
- Decision and Implementation
  - Victim Notification in Cold Cases
  - Sexual Assault Information Line
Justice Advocate Position

Direct result of SAK Task Force

Duties

- Liaison between investigators and survivors
- Respond to the needs of survivors of sexual assault through crisis intervention and resource referral
- Consult with investigators
Unique Position

- *INSIDE* the Unit
- Flexibility to go into the field with investigators
- Flexibility to be with survivors before/after statement
- Provide clinical support
- Support for survivors’ support system
- Collaborate with investigator, consult on cases
Challenges

- History between Law Enforcements & Advocates
  - “Oil & Water”*
  - Sam Houston State University research**
- Gaining trust within the Unit
- Defining clear role of Advocate

*Lonsway, K. & Archambault, J. “Advocates and Law Enforcement: Oil and Water?”
Victim Notification Protocols: Development and Implementation
Research

- Literature review
- Spoke with advocates in other jurisdictions
- The University of Texas at Austin research: Interviews with survivors and professionals
UT Research

Findings from survivors and professionals:

- Survivors have the **right to know about the status** of the SAK
- Victims would want information about their case **if able to** prosecute or move forward
- **Unintended consequences / re-traumatization** with notification
- **Mixed feelings and differing opinions** regarding notification in cases not moving forward

UT Research

Recommendations from survivors and professionals on notification:

- Element of **choice and control** in notification
- All should be given the **opportunity** to be notified; should not assume that a victim wants to be notified
- Mechanisms should be **flexible and thoughtful**
- Victims want **choice in whether or not their case moved forward**
- **Resources** and **support** in notification

UT Research

Recommendations from survivors and professionals on *how to notify survivors*:

- Letters and phone calls utilized only for initial contact (no sensitive information provided)
- In-person contact to share case-related information
- Advocates should be engaged in notification process
- Call in center
- Public Service announcement
- Password-protected website

Issues of contact:
- Which survivors to contact?
- How to contact survivors?
- When to contact survivors?

Issues to consider:
- Re-traumatization
- Resources / Feasibility
ALL sexual assault kits tested.
ALL cases are being reviewed.

Which survivors are being contacted?
- Survivors whose SAK results in a CODIS-hit and has the potential to move forward

Not all survivors are being notified.
- Trauma-informed
- Victim-centered

The FBI’s Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is a software platform that blends forensic science and computer technology, which stores felony offender DNA profiles. [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/biometric-analysis/codis/ndis-statistics](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/biometric-analysis/codis/ndis-statistics)
Ideal Communication:

- First contact: phone
- New case-related information will be provided in person
  - Advocate join, when possible
  - Advocate phone follow-up with survivor

Investigator works closely with Justice Advocate

- Advocate works with both Adult and Juvenile survivors
How’s it going so far?

- Difficulty locating and contacting survivors
- Difficult decision for survivors
- Retraumatization
  - “Brought it all back”
  - Flashbacks, nightmares, re-living assault
  - Hyper-arousal
- Positive statement
  - Realized “I needed a voice” in this case
  - “Never dealt with it back then”
What about everyone else?

Sexual Assault Information Line & Email

- (713) 308-1400
- SAinfo@houstonpolice.org
Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm

- Voicemail on evening and weekends
- Trained Responders
Information provided over the line
- Limited due to confidentiality

Information collected over the line
- As much as possible
- Caller/Survivor contact information
- Brief information about the sexual assault

Information provided to investigator for follow-up
Justice Advocate, Evaluation

- Investigator focus group (current case)
  - Positive feedback
- Feedback from Cold Case investigators
  - Currently being collected through surveys
- Continued evaluation

Permanent position approved
Challenges:

- Relationship building is ongoing
- Messaging is consistent
- Continually fine-tuning actions
The project continues…

- Case review ongoing
- Continual strategic discussions
- Presentation requests on findings/efforts
- Continue promotion of SAIL
Thank you

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For more information: [www.houstonsakresearch.org](http://www.houstonsakresearch.org)
Thank you!

Please fill out our evaluation!

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