



D49 Examination of Sexual Violence Victims in Colombia: A New Approach

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn the reality of the medical examiner's response to survivors of sex crimes in Colombia. The introduction of new elements in routine victim examinations will be proposed.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing new technical and technological tools that will provide medical examiners with new basic equipment for the collection of evidence from sex crimes survivors in Colombia. Three sexual assault cases evaluated by the Forensic Clinical Services of the Colombian Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences will be described.

A large part of the Institute's casework is represented by forensic examinations of victims who report sexual abuse. According to the 2010 Masatugo publication, 73,395 sexual violence victims were examined between 2004 and 2008. These victims were primarily girls and female teenagers under 18 years of age. Forensic examinations of sexual abuse victims require a thorough search for physical evidence, which is essential for prosecution. Although sexual assault reports are less frequent, the special characteristics of these crimes, where physical force and contact between the perpetrator and the victim are involved, require expertise of medical examiners in terms of finding as much evidence as possible. The other element of the investigation is the investigators who work in both sexual abuse and sexual assault cases. Their efforts involve interviewing victims, understanding the context of the crime scene, and obtaining additional information to clarify the facts. Witness presentation helps prove the case beyond reasonable doubt. However, cases where no physical evidence exists are a huge challenge. Until recently, forensic examinations of sex crime survivors in Colombia were visually conducted by medical examiners. This promotes the loss of imperceptible evidence that examiners may miss. Obviously, this is not only detrimental to the victim, but it promotes impunity. Health centers in charge of sexual assault victims' attention should be equipped with new technical tools that help medical examiners minimize the loss of physical evidence. The first recommendation is the use of alternate light sources (ALS) for both the victim's physical examination and her/his clothes. Alternate light sources contribute to the detection of evidence frequently found in unusual places. The use of dermatologists magnifier

glasses is also recommended. Toluidine blue staining and colposcopic examinations should be part of the process.

In these cases, alternate light sources, dermatologic magnifier glasses, Toluidine blue staining, and colposcopy were systematically used. These cases prove that these instruments may help medical examiners find relevant evidence. Consequently, these tools should be part of the basic equipment required by health care centers responsible for these cases. This new procedure will give the forensic community the arguments required to support the need for the routine use of these instruments.

Sexual Assault, Physical Evidence, Basic Equipment