



E46 Are We There Yet? The Testing of Unsubmitted Sexual Assault Kits and the Development of New Research Partnerships

Heather E. Waltke, MS, 3601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Unit 120, Washington, DC 20008; and Gerald M. LaPorte, MSFS, National Institute of Justice, Office of Inv & Forensic Science, 810 Seventh Street, NW, Washington, DC 20531*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be more knowledgeable about federal support to state and local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to reduce the number of unsubmitted Sexual Assault Kits (SAKs).

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating what research reveals regarding the nature of unsubmitted SAKs.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research, development, and evaluation agency of the United States Department of Justice, leads the nation in supporting the forensic sciences through research and by providing state and local crime labs with funding to help process and test evidence more efficiently in an effort to reduce backlogs. NIJ continually draws on the needs of practitioners to inform its research and programmatic agenda. This presentation will focus on a research initiative that is designed to help provide information concerning evidence collection, processing practices, and testing protocols for SAKs. Specifically, this research initiative is an endeavor to help address a major need in our nation's forensic science and criminal justice communities: to support state and local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to reduce the number of unsubmitted SAKs.

The focus of this effort is in the collection and analysis of valuable data concerning the nature of sexual assault evidence contained in previously unsubmitted SAKs. Further, obtaining an understanding of the various processes associated with analysis such as screening and testing are fundamental in the effort to inform best practices for collecting, analyzing, and testing evidence from sexual assault cases specific to the processing of large quantities of unsubmitted SAKs. The knowledge garnered as a result of this effort will be used to fulfill the long-term goal of improving current and future best practices for collecting quality evidence and processing SAKs in a more timely and efficient manner.

Over the years, forensic DNA analysis has proven to be invaluable to the law enforcement community, the victims of violent crimes, and their families. This initiative also directly supports the goal of carrying out analysis of samples from untested, unsubmitted SAKs so DNA profiles can be developed and placed in the National DNA Index System (NDIS). More violent crimes are solved as more DNA profiles are placed in NDIS, which is considered one part of the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) program of support for criminal justice DNA databases, as well as the software used to run these databases. NDIS has been particularly helpful to investigations that are very old and no longer producing new leads.

Decades ago, crimes from cold cases would have remained unsolved. The national database has been instrumental in solving violent crimes and providing valuable investigative leads to law enforcement. The upload of eligible profiles generated from DNA analysis as a result of this research initiative into NDIS provides direct aid in the investigation of violent crimes involving sexual assault and in the capability to solve more crimes to ultimately hold more criminals accountable. After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about NIJ's efforts to support state and local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to reduce the number of unsubmitted SAKs. In addition, attendees will learn about what research reveals regarding the nature of unsubmitted SAKs.

Sexual Assault Kits, Rape Kits, Untested Rape Kits