

## E27 Forensic Science Learning for Victims of Enforced Disappearances: Study Results

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will have learned the results of an innovative teaching program in basic forensic science and crime scene investigation developed for the relatives of victims of enforced disappearances and violations of human rights.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing attendees that people without any background in/knowledge of forensic science and crime scene investigation field are able to address and process a crime scene.

Enforced disappearances are a major issue that several nations have faced throughout history and that have left a problematic number of people declared “missing” around the world. An “enforced disappearance” is the kidnapping process of a person by an unknown individual/organization with the purpose of acting outside the margins of the law. Oftentimes, enforced disappearances entail the assassination of the kidnapped person, whose body is usually discarded, leaving the feeling that the victim has faded away from the face of the earth. Enforced disappearances have occurred in different contexts throughout the world’s history. Some of the most remarkable contexts are dictatorships, armed conflicts, and drug trafficking. These illegal actions have been used as a terror-spreading strategy in several countries and regions around the world such as Sri Lanka, Syria, and Mexico, countries where enforced disappearances have become a serious problem not only for the victims themselves and governments but also for their close relatives.

Drug trafficking is considered one of the most important contexts in which numerous people are being declared “missing,” and Mexico ranks among the countries with the highest number of enforced disappearances. This is why many groups of close relatives of enforced disappeared people have been formed throughout Mexico, initially with the main goal of supporting the close relatives of the “missing,” but subsequently with the purpose of going out into the field searching for any kind of physical evidence that can be provided to the prosecutor’s office and help with the investigation of these cases. One these groups is Sabuesos Guerreras (Warrior Hounds), a not-for-profit organization from the city of Culiacan, in state of Sinaloa, Mexico. This group is composed mainly of women whose beloved husbands and/or sons have been victims of enforced disappearances, and for years, besides supporting each other sociologically and economically, they have searched for physical evidence in different open fields of the state.

The aim for cooperating in the world’s fight for human rights as well as helping groups like the Sabuesos Guerreras is the inspiration for creating an innovative training program in basic forensic science with the main goal for these groups to be able to use the knowledge they are acquiring through this program in their own relatives’ cases. This training program is a ten-class online course, one lesson per week, with three main learning subjects: Crime Scene Investigation, Analysis and Preservation of Physical Evidence, and Management of an Organization for Victims of Enforced Disappearances. In this program, participants are assessed before the course begins and after it ends, using the very same evaluation instrument. This assessment consists of four questions relative to the subjects of the course, and their goal will be assessing the amount of learning acquired throughout the course by the participants. Also, the participants will know the results of the searching process at the field after the students have finished this course. This program was been created as a result of a PhD thesis and has been developed to be offered online from Chaminade University of Honolulu, HI, to its recipients in Culiacan, Sinaloa State, Mexico, in Spanish. This educational program can be utilized for other groups of victims of enforced disappearances around the world in different languages.

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### Enforced Disappearances Victims, Online Teaching Program, Education