The Detroit Sexual Assault Kit Action Research Project

Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D.
In August, 2009 representatives from the Wayne County Prosecutors Office and the Michigan State Police were invited to tour a Detroit Police Department property storage facility . . .
“We’re walking through, I see these like steel shelving units with boxes and I say, ‘What are those?’ They said, ‘Those are rape kits.’ I said, ‘Rape kits! What are all these rape kits doing here?’ I estimated . . . 10,000 or more.

And [I asked], ‘Are they tested or untested?’ And the officers [said], ‘I don’t know.’”
Concern over Detroit police handling of rape kits

DETROIT — Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy wants an independent investigation into what she says may be thousands of kits holding evidence of possible sexual assaults that were found in a Detroit Police Department evidence storage facility.

In a Sept. 8 letter to Police Chief Warren Evans, Worthy said there may be more than 10,000 so-called rape kits and hundreds of other pieces of evidence warehoused, unanalyzed, in a police "overflow property room." The situation raises fears that cases could be affected if the evidence is challenged in court, Worthy said.
Action Research Project

- Three primary goals:
  - Determine the **SCOPE** of the problem
  - Understand the underlying **CAUSES** of how and why this happened
  - Develop & evaluate **SOLUTIONS** for kit testing and victim notification
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  - Understand the underlying **CAUSES** of how and why this happened
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SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

A Census of SAKs in Police Property
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HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW?
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How complete & accurate?
Pulled each and every kit out of police property and counted them ONE BY ONE
11,304 SAKs
11,304 SAKs

1980

30 YEARS

2009

PEDIATRIC PATIENTS

ADOLESCENT PATIENTS

ADULT PATIENTS
11,304 SAKs

400 previously pulled for The 400 Project

2,399 have lab numbers

10,904

8,505 never submitted to lab
11,304 SAKs

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HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?!
UNDERLYING CAUSES

How and Why Did This Happen?
A Systemic Approach
A Systemic Approach

Problem rooted in long-standing relationships *within* and *between* organizations
POLICE
Disbelief & Victim Blaming Among Law Enforcement
Disbelief & Victim Blaming Among Law Enforcement

“She’s not acting like a real victim”

“This is a he-said, she-said thing”

“It’s not rape, it’s a deal gone bad”

“What did she expect? Being with him?”

“Why was she there in the first place?”

“She’s lying to cover up something”
Disbelief & Victim Blaming Among Law Enforcement

- "She’s not acting like a real victim"
- "It’s not rape, it’s a deal gone bad"
- "This is a he-said, she-said thing"
- "What did she expect? Being with him?"
- "Why was she there in the first place?"
- "She’s lying to cover up something"

POLICE
TRAINING
EDUCATION
SUPERVISION
No Policy or Protocol Regarding Kit Testing
No Policy or Protocol Regarding Kit Testing

Who Decides Whether a Kit Will Be Tested?
Drastic Reductions in Personnel Over Time
Drastic Reductions in Personnel Over Time

Police → Crime Lab

Crime Lab → Prosecution

Two DNA Scientists
Drastic Reductions in Personnel Over Time

50% Reduction

Two DNA Scientists
Drastic Reductions in Personnel Over Time

50% Reduction

POLICE

CRIME LAB

Two DNA Scientists

PROSECUTION

TWICE
Drastic Reductions in Personnel Over Time

- 50% Reduction
- Twice

POLICE -> CRIME LAB

Two DNA Scientists
No Specialized Unit

PROSECUTION
Numerous Changes in Leadership and Supervision
Numerous Changes in Leadership and Supervision

Nine Chiefs Over 20 Years
Five Chiefs < 3 Years
Average Tenure = 2.2 Years
Numerous Changes in Leadership and Supervision

**Nine** Chiefs Over 20 Years
Five Chiefs < 3 Years
Average Tenure = 2.2 Years

Nationally
Average Tenure for Chiefs in Metropolitan Cities = 3.5 - 4.5 years
Average Tenure for Chiefs in Jurisdictions Over 500,000 = 5 years
Good Quality Medical Forensic Exams Were Not Available Until 2006
Good Quality Medical Forensic Exams Were Not Available Until 2006

Forensic Adequacy ??
Good Patient Care ??

MEDICAL

POLICE

CRIME LAB

PROSECUTION
AFTER SANE Program Established, Police *significantly* more likely to submit SAKs for testing
Community-Based Advocacy Services ~ Non-Existental
Community-Based Advocacy Services ~ Non-Existent
WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE SURVIVORS?
WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE SURVIVORS?
**RISK FACTORS**

- Victim blaming beliefs & behaviors
- No policy on SAK testing
- Insufficient personnel
- Instability in leadership
- Lack of community-based advocacy
- Strained relationships
SOLUTIONS

Developing a SAK Testing Plan
11,304 SAKs

- 400 previously pulled for The 400 Project
- 10,904
  - 2,399 have lab numbers
  - 8,505 never submitted to lab

Detroit did not have the financial resources to test all of these kits.
11,304 SAKs

400
previously pulled for The 400 Project

10,904

2,399
have lab numbers

8,505
ever submitted to lab

A STRATIFIED RANDOM SAMPLE OF 1,600 SAKS TO BE TESTED IN THIS PROJECT
1,595
Tested & Reviewed
1,595
Tested & Reviewed

785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS
1,595 Tested & Reviewed

785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS

CODIS ENTRY RATE

785 / 1595 49%
1,595 Tested & Reviewed

785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS

455 CODIS Hits
1,595 Tested & Reviewed

785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS

455 CODIS Hits

CODIS HIT RATE

455 / 785
58%
785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS
455 CODIS Hits
Felony Crimes in 23 States
1,595 Tested & Reviewed

785 Profiles Entered Into CODIS

455 CODIS Hits

127 SERIAL SEXUAL ASSAULTS

127 / 455 28%
CHANGES

The Benefits of an Multidisciplinary Action Research Approach
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

✓ Improving communication & collaboration
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

- Improving communication & collaboration
- Rebuilding personnel levels
- Building up victim advocacy
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

- Improving communication & collaboration
- Rebuilding personnel levels
- Building up victim advocacy
- Testing all current SAKs
- Testing all previously-untested SAKs
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

- Improving communication & collaboration
- Rebuilding personnel levels
- Building up victim advocacy
- Testing all current SAKs
- Testing all previously-untested SAKs
- NEW LEGISLATION (PA 227) to test all SAKs released by victims for testing
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

✓ Improving communication & collaboration
✓ Rebuilding personnel levels
✓ Building up victim advocacy
✓ Testing all current SAKs
✓ Testing all previously-untested SAKs
✓ NEW LEGISLATION (PA 227) to test all SAKs released by victims for testing
✓ Pilot SAK tracking project with UPS
WHAT’S DIFFERENT NOW?

- Improving communication & collaboration
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- Building up victim advocacy
- Testing all current SAKs
- Testing all previously-untested SAKs
- NEW LEGISLATION (PA 227) to test all SAKs released by victims for testing
- Pilot SAK tracking project with UPS
COMING SOON . . .

Step-by-Step Guide for Conducting a Census of Police Property

Developing a SAK Testing Plan

SAK Testing Results & Recommendations

Step-by-Step Guide for Creating a Victim-Centered, Trauma-Informed Victim Notification Protocol

Sample Victim Notification Protocol

Victim Notification Evaluation Results

Empirically-Based Recommendations for Policy, Practice, & Prevention
Thank You !!
Please Stay Tuned . . .