



Four Reports from Houston Sexual Assault Kit Research Finalized, Released

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The multidisciplinary team that came together to research and respond to the issue of untested sexual assault kits in Houston has released four more reports resulting from their work. The four most recent reports make recommendations on topics related to victim notification and improving judicial and law enforcement responses to sexual assault victims.

The research and findings result from a \$1.5 million National Institute of Justice (NIJ) grant issued in 2011 that allowed Houston to form a multidisciplinary team to conduct an action-research project designed not only to investigate what led to more than 6,660 untested sexual assault kits, but also recommend and implement changes in the system to improve future results. The team included the University of Texas at Austin's Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, project co-principal investigator, Dr. Noel Busch-Armendariz and project director Caitlin Sulley. Busch-Armendariz and Sulley, both at UT Austin School of Social Work, are the authors of these reports.

As part of the project, the researchers interviewed sexual assault victims and professionals who engage with them following the attack. The research findings alluded to several themes, including the need to take a victim-centered approach when developing protocols for notifying victims that their sexual assault kit has been processed and a possible suspect has been found in the national DNA database, CODIS. The researchers made six recommendations regarding victim notification, including the

need to train law enforcement on the impact of trauma to improve their response to victims, and the need to provide victims with options for their next steps. The research and findings are outlined in four reports:

- [How to Notify Victims about Sexual Assault Kit Evidence: Insight and Recommendations from Victims and Professionals](#)
- [Key Components of Building a Successful Victim Notification Protocol](#)
- [Does the Justice Advocate Position Enhance Sex Crimes Investigations?](#)
- [Sexual Assault Victims' Experiences of Notification after a CODIS Hit](#)

The reports can be found on the team's website: www.houstonsakresearch.org.

The multidisciplinary team also included the Houston Police Department, the Houston Forensic Science Center, the Harris County District Attorney's Office, Harris Health System, the Houston Area Women's Center, Memorial Hermann Health System and Sam Houston State University's Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. In addition to the four reports recently released, four reports and two other peer-reviewed journal articles are already posted on the website, www.houstonsakresearch.org, and several more are expected.

The NIJ grant paid for the research and testing of 500 sexual assault kits. Later, the NIJ awarded Houston another \$2.2 million for additional testing of sexual assault kits and the City of Houston added another \$2.2 million to test and review all 6,663 kits that had been in the Houston Police Department Property Room. This part of the project was completed in February, resulting in more than 850 CODIS hits. Several cases have already gone to trial, and multi-year sentences have been handed down to some of those convicted.

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