

The CONNSACS Connection

• Connecticut's Leading Voice to End Sexual Violence • Autumn 2010 •

Untested Evidence Collection Kits

A recent episode of the popular NBC drama *Law and Order: SVU* focused on the issue of untested evidence collection kits and drew attention to a problem that has delayed or denied justice to sexual assault survivors throughout the country. The much-anticipated episode followed the story of a woman who was stalked and repeatedly raped over the course of several years. Although the victim had evidence collected in the past, and although detectives suspected that the offender had committed offenses in several cities, the evidence sat untested in forensic labs and therefore did nothing to aid in the arrest of the perpetrator.

Sexual assault is one of the only crimes in which the victim's body is also the crime scene. If a victim showers, changes clothes, sweats, eats, or uses the restroom following an assault, evidence of the crime may be lost. In order to preserve physical evidence, sexual assault victims are encouraged to seek medical attention and undergo an evidence collection kit within 72 hours of an assault. The evidence collection kit, commonly referred to as a "rape kit," is a multi-step procedure intended to gather and preserve any DNA or other physical evidence that an offender may have left behind during a sexual assault.

Most sexual assault victims assume that once this evidence is collected and they file a police report, the kit will be sent to a forensic lab for evaluation. A 2009 investigative report by Sarah Tofte, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, uncovered that this was not the case: her [research](#) exposed 12,669 untested sexual assault evidence collection kits in Los Angeles County alone. Further [investigation](#) by CBS news found backlogs of 5,800 evidence collection kits in Detroit; 5,191 in San Antonio; 4,100 in Phoenix; and over 1,000 in cities such as Albuquerque, Cincinnati, and Birmingham. Every untested kit represents a missed opportunity to identify, apprehend, and prosecute a possible sex offender.

Throughout the country, states have varying policies and capabilities related to forensic science. Connecticut has a single forensic science laboratory that is responsible for all of the state's forensic examinations. In addition to processing sexual assault evidence collection kits, the Connecticut Forensic Science Laboratory processes evidence related to virtually all types of offenses, including arson, homicide, and computer crimes. The lab considers a kit to be backlogged from the moment it enters the lab until it is finished being evaluated, and the number of kits in the lab's possession changes on a daily basis. According to Kenneth Zercie, the Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory, there are approximately 185 kits that are currently held and in process of examination at the laboratory.

CONNSACS enjoys a strong relationship with the Forensic Science Laboratory. Representatives from both organizations participate in the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Advisory Committee as well as the Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations. Sexual Assault Crisis Advocates have also been given tours of the laboratory and received training about the evidence collection process from lab scientists. Being

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Connecticut Forensic Science Laboratory, Meriden, CT

Legislative Update: The Safe Harbor Act

Many of the laws that are passed during Connecticut's legislative session go into effect on July 1st or October 1st of the same year. One law that went into effect at the beginning of this month that is of particular interest to those working to combat violence against women and children is [PA 10-115](#) *An Act Providing Safe Harbor for Exploited Children*. CONNSACS actively supported the Safe Harbor Act during the 2010 legislative session and is excited to see this important law go into effect.

This legislative initiative, led by [ECPAT-USA](#), the [Barnaba Institute](#), and [Love146](#), ensures that if a child under age eighteen is arrested for prostitution, it will be assumed that he or she was acting under coercion. Under previous Connecticut law, it was possible that children – even those under age sixteen, the age of consent – could be arrested for and charged with the crime of prostitution. When children under the age of eighteen are engaged in prostitution, it is hard to imagine that their participation is not coerced through physical or economic violence. Coerced sex is rape, and victims should be protected, not prosecuted, under Connecticut law.

The Safe Harbor Act does not make prostitution legal, but it does ensure that culpability for prostitution will be placed where it truly belongs: with the pimps who profit from the abuse of minors and the johns who pay to hurt children. Teen and child survivors of sexual violence face many barriers to disclosing their abuse, including fear for their safety, fear of

the laboratory and received training about the evidence collection process from lab scientists. Being knowledgeable about evidence collection and processing allows advocates to better inform victims about the importance of the evidence collection kits.

The Law and Order: SVU episode about the evidence collection backlog came about in part because of the advocacy work of one of its stars, Mariska Hargitay. Her organization, The Joyful Heart Foundation, has created a new website dedicated to the backlog nationwide. To learn more about this important issue, visit the foundation's [End the Backlog](#) website.

and child survivors of sexual violence face many barriers to disclosing their abuse, including fear for their safety, fear of not being believed, and fear of being blamed for their victimization. They should not also have to fear prosecution if they reach out for support and assistance. The Safe Harbor law removes one of the many barriers that exist for children who want to leave an exploitive situation.

CONNSACS was pleased to have the opportunity to advocate on behalf of this important legislation and applauds the legislature for its near unanimous support. Victims are never guilty of their own victimization, and young victims of sexual violence deserve the protections that are now available to them through the Safe Harbor Act.



Tertiary Victim Support Groups

CONNSACS has fourteen specialized victim advocates who work in sex offender supervision units along with probation, parole, and sex offender treatment providers. Having victim advocates in these probation and parole units acknowledges that victims/survivors have concerns about their offenders being released back into their communities. These advocates serve as safe conduits through which sexual assault victims/survivors can receive information about their offenders and offer input about how an offender's release into the community will impact their lives.

Probation and parole victim advocates also provide valuable services to an often overlooked demographic: the partners, children, and friends of offenders who are also affected by their loved one's perpetration. These individuals, called *tertiary victims*, can play an important role in providing positive community support to offenders and helping them respect the conditions of their probation and/or parole.

CONNSACS began its first Tertiary Victim Support Group last year for family and friends of offenders on probation in Hartford and Manchester. The groups have now expanded statewide so that all probation offices are covered. The goal of this group is to give offenders' support networks an opportunity to talk about any issues or concerns that they have, to learn more about the conditions of probation/parole, to discuss the impact that a social support network can have on the offender, and to learn about the impact of sexual assault on primary victims. Tertiary victims may feel anger, embarrassment, betrayal, or fear because of the offense that their loved one committed. This support group is an opportunity for tertiary victims to talk through those emotions and to learn about how they can contribute to victim and community safety by helping offenders meet the conditions of their probation and parole.

Local sexual assault crisis services programs offer various support groups for primary victims of sexual violence (those who were directly harmed by an offender). Information about these groups is available on our [website](#).

Fast Fact

Between July 2009 and June 2010, advocates at Sexual Assault Crisis Services programs provided services to 3845 sexual assault victims and their families.

Advocates in Sex Offender Supervision Units served an additional 1345 victims and their families. Of victims who received services at SACS programs, only 7.52% reported that they were assaulted by a stranger.

In the News

[Craigslist Removes Adult Services Section](#)

After years of scrutiny, Craigslist (an online marketplace) shut down its Adult Services Section of the site. The site was accused of not adequately screening ads therefore allowing for illegal postings promoting prostitution and child trafficking.

[Virginity Testing in India](#)

Many Indian states require a test for "vaginal laxity" to be performed during the forensic exam of a sexual assault victim. This test is said to be necessary in determining if the woman is "habituated to sexual intercourse." Human Rights groups are fighting for this test to be banned, as it is "degrading and unscientific" as well as constitutes a second assault on the victim.

[US: Immigration Detainees at Risk of Sexual Abuse](#)

Human Rights Report released a report ("[Detained and at Risk](#):"

Sexual Assault Crisis Services Programs in Connecticut

24 Hour Free and Confidential Hotline
1-888-999-5545 (English)
1-888-568-8332 (Español)

[Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County, Inc.](#) (Bridgeport)

Office: 203-334-6154
Hotline: 203-333-2233

[Women's Center of Greater Danbury Sexual Assault Crisis Services](#)

Office: 203-731-5200
Hotline: 203-731-5204

[Women and Families Center](#)
(Meriden, Middletown, New Haven)

[US: Immigration Detainees at Risk of Sexual Abuse](#)
Human Rights Report released a report ("[Detained and at Risk: Sexual Abuse and Harassment in United States Immigration Detention](#)") describing reported incidents of sexual abuse and harassment occurring in immigration detention centers. The report called for The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to address the issue with extreme policy changes.

[Yale Fraternity Chant Draws Criticism](#)

A group of Delta Kappa Epsilon pledges at Yale University were heard shouting vulgar sexual chants around campus last week. The chants included "jokes" about consent and sexual violence. Students are demanding the administration take action, especially since this is not the first time a fraternity has made sexist displays on the Yale campus. CONNSACS has [responded](#) to this incident.

Sexual Victimization in Prisons and Jails

The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) requires the Bureau of Justice Statistics to conduct annual statistical reviews of the incidence and effects of prison rape. In fulfillment of that requirement, the Bureau of Justice Statistics recently released [Sexual Victimization in Prisons and Jails Reported by Inmates, 2008-09](#), a report based on data collected through the second ever National Inmate Survey (NIS-2). The survey, which was collected between October 2008 and December 2009, was given to 81,566 adult inmates in 167 state and federal prisons, 286 jails, and 10 special confinement facilities operated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the military, and Indian country authorities.

Inmates were asked about any incidents of sexual victimization they had experienced while incarcerated. 4.4% of prison inmates and 3.1% of jail inmates reported one or more incidents of sexual victimization in the twelve-month period leading up to the survey. In both prisons and jails, perpetrators were more likely to be staff than fellow inmates. 2.1% of state and federal inmates reported an incident involving another inmate while 2.8% reported an incident involving staff. In jails, 1.5% of incidents involved other inmates and 2.0% involved staff. 0.5% of prison inmates and 0.4% of jail inmates reported being sexually victimized by both inmates and staff.

The report also revealed that certain populations are more likely to be victimized. 11.2% of prison inmates "with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual" reported a sexual victimization, the highest of any single group. Inmates who were young, had a college degree or more, were of mixed racial backgrounds, or who had previously experienced sexual violence had the highest overall rates of victimization. The facility at which an inmate is housed can also be a risk factor: the report lists facilities with the highest and lowest reported rates of sexual victimization. Five facilities had no reports of sexual victimization, and ten facilities had reported victimization rates above 10%. None of the three Connecticut facilities involved in the survey – Corrigan-Radgowski Correctional Center, Osborn Correctional Institution, and York Correctional Institution – were listed among the high or low rate facilities.

Although the report does not make any recommendations about how to reduce sexual violence, the data creates a starting point from which correctional facilities can evaluate what policies work and do not work when it comes to keeping inmates safe. More information about the Prison Rape Elimination Act and national efforts to prevent sexual violence in correctional facilities is available from [Just Detention International](#).

[Women and Families Center](#)

(Meriden, Middletown, New Haven)
Meriden office: 203-235-9297
Middletown office: 860-344-1474
New Haven office: 203-389-5010
Hotline: 203-389-9700

[Rape Crisis Center of Milford](#)

Office: 203-874-8712
Hotline: 203-878-1212

[YWCA of New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Services](#)

(Hartford, New Britain)
New Britain office: 860-225-4681
New Britain hotline: 860-223-1787
Hartford office: 860-241-9217
Hartford hotline: 860-547-1022

[The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education](#) (Stamford)

Office: 203-348-9346
Hotline: 203-329-2929

[Susan B. Anthony Project](#) (Torrington)

Office: 860-489-3798
Hotline: 860-482-7133

[Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury](#)

Office: 203-753-3613
Hotline: 203-753-3613

[Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut](#)

(Willimantic, New London)
Willimantic office: 860-456-3595
Willimantic hotline: 860-456-2789
New London office: 860-442-0604
New London hotline: 860-437-7766



The **CONNSACS Connection** is a quarterly publication of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, the statewide coalition of Connecticut's nine sexual assault crisis services programs. CONNSACS works to end sexual violence through victim assistance, community education, and public policy advocacy. Learn more about us at: www.connsacs.org

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