

State Crime: Special Victims Unit: Nationwide Analysis of Untested Sexual Assault Kits

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Recent attention to the existence of large numbers of untested Sexual Assault Kits (SAKs) has been spurred by media reports of over 10,000 untested kits in Detroit and by government funding to address the backlog. There is documented evidence of this backlog in all but 13 states in this country. The National Institute for Justice is currently funding several action research projects in large cities across the U.S. designed to identify the reasons for these backlogs as well as what can be done to address them. Nationwide, this backlog consists of SAKs awaiting testing at crime laboratories and SAKs held in storage at police facilities, never submitted for testing. Such a backlog directly impedes the opportunity for victims to obtain justice. This paper investigates the nationwide backlog on the testing of SAKs as a state crime, especially in regards to law enforcement. I will review the findings from the aforementioned ongoing projects as well as other applicable resources with regards to the relevant motivations, opportunities, and social controls in this state crime. Through examining these components I will also review the steps (if any) that states are currently undertaking to address the backlog and work with the victims in order to achieve justice.