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Document Title: Unsubmitted Sexual Assault Kits in Houston, TX: Case Characteristics, Forensic Testing Results, and the Investigation of CODIS Hits, Executive Summary

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Unsubmitted Sexual Assault Kits in Houston, TX: Case Characteristics, Forensic Testing Results, and the Investigation of CODIS Hits

Executive Summary

March 1, 2016

The National Institute of Justice funded an action-research project in Houston, TX between 2011 and 2015 to study the problem of untested sexual assault kits and to institute reforms. The project produced new insights into the issue and helped shape multiple reforms in Houston. One component of the project measured the testing and investigation outcomes in a sample of sexual assault cases after kits were tested. The primary purpose of this report is to describe key characteristics of the sample, including the testing and investigation results, but the report also provides an overview of the Houston project and many of the reforms that were implemented.

Methods

In March 2012 the HPD crime lab identified 6,571 criminal sexual cases that contained a sexual assault kit that had not been submitted to a crime lab for testing.

A sample of 493 cases was selected for the study. Criminal investigation case files provided data about the investigation, victims, and offenders. The study measured forensic testing results and aspects of the follow-up investigation in CODIS-hit cases.

Forensic Testing Outcomes

- A DNA profile was developed from 55% of the kits
- A profile was uploaded to CODIS in 43% of the kits
- A CODIS hit was returned for 21% of the sample
- The patterns of testing results are similar to those obtained from the Detroit (MI) ARP

CODIS-Hit Investigation Results

The study measured the investigative outcomes of cases in the sample of 104 CODIS-hit cases. At the time data collection ended in August 2015:

- One new criminal filing had occurred
- The statute of limitations had expired in 44% of the CODIS-hit cases
- The investigator was unable to make contact with the victim in 13% of CODIS-hit cases
- The victim appeared unwilling to participate in the follow-up investigation in 13% of CODIS-hit cases
- The hit identified a perpetrator who was arrested at the time of the original investigation in 12% of the CODIS-hit cases