

Sexual abuse (police foundations course)



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26 December 2007 Investigating Sexual Abuse The investigation of sexual abuse is not an easy task. In fact, according to Brown, " Sexual abuse is often an event more difficult to investigate and prosecute than other types of sex offenses" (216) . This is because, such investigations are complicated by the extremely perishable nature of the evidence. Even if the evidence is intact it is hard to interpret it correctly and determine its significance to the crime. Much depends on the victim's testimony and it is difficult to establish the veracity of such statements without the backing of concrete evidence. Moreover, the taboos surrounding the sex act affect the investigation of offenses related to it. The victim is often blamed and treated insensitively with callous disregard for the outcome. Given the situation, it is imperative that the investigation be conducted with painstaking attention to detail, because failure to do so will allow the offenders to escape the justice they so richly deserve.

The crime scene investigation is crucial as it is the foundation on which the case against the offender will be built. The crime scene must be secured and photographs should be taken before following the prescribed protocol for such situations. The next step is the collection of forensic evidence " which might provide a clue to the identity of the killer" (Geberth 440) . Such evidence may often be the only way to trace, implicate and convict the guilty party. Physical evidence from the scene such as fingerprints, stray hairs, fibers, used condoms, gloves, urine, feces, blood, and the like must be carefully gathered and preserved as they are the means by which the offender may be linked to the scene of the crime and the victim. The collection of these materials must be documented and photographed in order to avoid damage from exposure to the weather or careless handling.

The next step is the thorough medical examination of the victim. According to Palmiotto, " If the case is fresh, the victim is usually the best source of evidence" (185) . The services of a trained medical practitioner may be used or the victim's personal physician. In addition to this, sex crime kits are readily available and may be carried by officers. This simplifies the process and ensures efficiency. There may be traces of foreign materials such as semen, saliva, and / or blood in the body, aside from the victims own secretions and bodily fluids. The fingernails and toenails must be examined to locate traces of the offender and clues regarding the location where the crime actually occurred. Bruises, cuts, scratches, and other signs of violence must be noted and duly recorded. Evidence thus gathered is invaluable to the reconstruction of the crime. It provides clues to the personality of the offender and is useful in drawing up a profile. Physical evidence is tested for DNA matches. This importance of this step to the investigation cannot be stressed enough, " Failure to recognize the possibility of evidence on the victim's person may result in the destruction of valuable forensic evidence" (Becker 297) .

Finally with regard to testimonial evidence, due attention must be given to the interview method by which such evidence is gathered. Officers must be skilled in putting the victim and other witnesses at ease in order to extract the needed information. Physical as well as testimonial evidence is important to the investigation, as both contribute to the identification of the perpetrator. Nowadays intensive training is given to police personnel carrying out such delicate work, to help them conduct the investigation expertly and to avoid the miscarriage of justice brought on by sloppy work.

Works Cited

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