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Standard Guide for Sexual Assault Investigation, Examination, and Evidence Collection¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers the basic components for the development of a sexual assault investigation protocol, with specific attention to the examination of assault scenes, victims and suspects of sexual assault, the recovery of testimonial, physical, and behavioral evidence, and the preservation and custody of physical evidence.

1.2 This guide outlines procedures requiring the experience of experts in a diversity of fields. A multidisciplinary team approach to sexual assault investigation is necessary and is the current standard of care. This team should include members skilled in the following disciplines: law enforcement, criminalistics, victim advocacy, and clinical, forensic practice.

1.3 This guide offers a set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations. This standard cannot replace knowledge, skill, or ability acquired through appropriate education, training, and experience and should be used in conjunction with sound professional judgment.

1.4 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.5 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.11 on Interdisciplinary Forensic Science Standards.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standards' s Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

E620 Practice for Reporting Opinions of Scientific or Technical Experts

E1020 Practice for Reporting Incidents that May Involve Criminal or Civil Litigation

E1188 Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator

E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation

E1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory

3. General Protocol

3.1 *General Information*—Sexual assault is an underreported crime. The most serious misunderstandings displayed on the part of investigators are common misunderstandings of particular categories of victims (enumerated below) and a lack of willingness to work with professionals in allied disciplines who also provide valuable services in this area:

- 3.1.1 Sensitivity to victim needs,
- 3.1.2 The elderly victim,
- 3.1.3 The disabled victim,
- 3.1.4 The male victim,
- 3.1.5 The child victim (see Section 4),
- 3.1.6 The cultural heritage of the victim,
- 3.1.7 The homosexual victim, and
- 3.1.8 The deceased victim.

3.2 *Initial Law Enforcement Response*—Sexual assaults most often come to the attention of law enforcement personnel as initial responders. It is essential for initial responders to have in place mechanisms for the immediate notification of allied professionals that must also respond in a timely manner to effect the proper investigation of these incidents. The following topical areas should be addressed in written procedures by law enforcement agencies responding to sexual assaults:

- 3.2.1 Victim safety and security;
- 3.2.2 Activate multidisciplinary team;
- 3.2.3 Initial victim interview and transport to examining facility;
- 3.2.4 Scene security;
- 3.2.5 Scene search;
- 3.2.6 Evidence identification, recovery, and security; and
- 3.2.7 Suspect detection, apprehension, and interview.