

Just a Guide to Sexual Assault Response Reform

Introduction [00:00:05] Now, this is recording, RTI International Center for Forensic Science presents Just Science.

Voiceover [00:00:22] Welcome to Just Science, a podcast for justice professionals and anyone interested in learning more about forensic science, innovative technology, current research, and actionable strategies to improve the criminal justice system. In episode three of our Sexual Assault Awareness Month mini season, Just Science sat down with Dr. Patricia Melton, co-director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance's National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Program to discuss a new resource that will help criminal justice practitioners support sexual assault reform. Creating a comprehensive, improved response to sexual assault requires policies and practices that are grounded in trauma informed, victim centered approaches. Criminal justice practitioners must invest in methodologies that foster multidisciplinary team engagement, training, and the implementation of technologies associated with tracking sexual assault forensic evidence. Dr. Melton has created a guide that addresses the complexities of sexual assault reform. This resource highlights real world solutions to foster improved resolutions to sexual assault cases while ensuring support to survivors. Listen along as she discusses the value of multidisciplinary teams in her new resource, "Enacting an Improved Response to Sexual Assault; a Practitioner's Guide to Successful Sexual Assault Response Reform" in this episode of Just Science. This season is funded by the National Institute of Justice's Forensic Technology Center of Excellence. Here's your host, Tyler Raible.

Tyler Raible [00:01:58] Hello, hello, hello and welcome to Just Science. I'm your host, Tyler Raible with the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence, a program of the National Institute of Justice. You're tuning in for the third episode of our mini season in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. In order to continue the conversation in the arena of sexual assault response reform, I'm joined by Dr. Patricia Melton from RTI International. Dr. Melton is the co-director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance's National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project. Welcome, Pattie. It's great to see you.

Patricia Melton [00:02:28] Thank you so much. I'm super happy to be here.

Tyler Raible [00:02:30] We're obviously thrilled to have you on the podcast. You've actually hosted Just Science before, so this is kind of a nice role reversal, right? Switching up a little bit.

Patricia Melton [00:02:38] Yes. This is a much-welcomed role reversal. I'd rather be on this end than the one that you have.

Tyler Raible [00:02:44] Well, I appreciate it, at least the vote of confidence, if nothing else. So, as you're aware, and as I already previously mentioned, April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. What does that mean to you?

Patricia Melton [00:02:53] You know, for me, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, it's really an exciting time because I feel it brings just the national awareness to our communities that we are dedicated to resolving sexual assault cases. What I love is, suddenly on Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we see communities coming together. They're doing marches or doing events. They're wearing teal. They're just getting messages out there

that this is all on the forefront. We are still fighting this violent crime and we will continue to fight this violent crime. But there's a little bit of additional empowerment. It's that recognition that we are all in this together. There's no more silos. We are fighting for a united cause. And I think that that's refreshing to see. I think also during Sexual Assault Awareness Month, there's a lot more opportunity to hear from our survivors and just the healing they've gone through, the successes they've had, the changes they've made in their lives. They can become incredible, inspiring individuals who just continue to motivate all of us to continue to work hard at this. But they have a special message, I think, to other sexual assault survivors in the community that there can be help, there can be healing and there can be change. And I think that's a very optimistic message to have when you're addressing a violent crime like this.

Tyler Raible [00:04:19] I mean, it really is a month about awareness and it really revolves around all of the communities involved. And there's a broad distinction, at least at the national level, for supporting everybody who needs it, right. Supporting the investigators, supporting the victims, supporting the advocates, supporting prosecutors. And you've been involved at a national level for several years now. Are there any special moments you'd like to highlight or you'd want to share with our audience?

Patricia Melton [00:04:44] I think just over the years, some of the highlighted moments that come to me is when I'm engaged working with someone, whether it be an agency or an individual, that could be an investigator, it could be a victim advocate, could be a prosecutor, could even be a survivor. But when they share their story and they share their case and you're able to help them move that forward, that's incredibly rewarding because there's so much variability across these cases. This is never a one-size-fits-all. So when you can get out there and share experiences, share techniques that have worked, really help brainstorm different approaches to these cases, it opens up a whole nother window, and I think that's just incredibly rewarding. Certainly, I miss being in-person for conferences because then you have a lot of these sidebar conversations and that's where really a lot of this takes place. And just sharing knowledge and knowing that I'm able to provide some sort of resource or guidance to an individual that helps move that case forward is incredibly rewarding. Those are really special moments. But I think probably the most impactful to me have been when a survivor has come up and said, you know, thank you for the work that you're doing. You gave me some insight into this or I appreciate everything that's happening. Or can you even direct me to an additional resource? Can you connect me with this person? You really recognize the impact that sexual assault has in our communities is not just at the level of an individual survivor. It impacts their family, their friends, and their entire community. So when you start to bring all these people together and have these conversations, you realize the breadth and scope of this work. When I see that come together, that is incredibly impactful to me because it really means we are working at this and we are making a difference. We are making progress.

Tyler Raible [00:06:30] You mentioned a few times directing people to resources that might be useful, trying to kind of bridge gaps and stuff of that nature. And I know that you just recently were involved in the publication of a resource called "Enacting an Improved Response to Sexual Assault; a Practitioner's Guide to Successful Sexual Assault Response Reform." So what exactly led to creating this resource? Can you speak a little bit about its development?

Patricia Melton [00:06:52] So in the work that I had done prior to creating that particular resource had really fallen under a lot of the training and technical assistance work I had done, in addition to what I had done in my former life as a forensic DNA practitioner, where

I used to educate law enforcement and prosecutors on DNA techniques and how that can impact your casework. So all those things become individual teaching and individual resources. What I recognized after having worked in sexual assault response reform for about a decade in this particular aspect, that when you attempt to take on all the complexities associated with an improved response to sexual assault, it becomes overwhelming very quickly because it is not only multidisciplinary, but it is multidimensional. So you not only need to bring together all these key stakeholders associated with sexual assault cases, which can include forensic medical personnel, sexual assault nurse examiners, law enforcement investigators, victim advocacy individuals, prosecutors, even the crime lab. You bring all these individuals together; they all have a different perspective. They all have a different role. And somehow, we've got to all come together and figure out a plan to address sexual assault cases. And then sort of embedded within that is this complexity of all these different moving parts. It becomes where do I start? How do I start? And if I am just one individual in one discipline, how do I bring these people together to the table? And who should I bring to the table? And what kind of conversation should we have? How do we really break down these silos and get to know each other and our discipline-specific perspectives and move everything forward? So that's really what was the forefront to creating this resource. I really wanted something that laid out a plan that helped in a textual way, in a graphical way, demonstrate that this is very complex, but you can break it down into subcomponents. And then within these subcomponents, you can start tackling them, you know, kind of in tandem and sequentially - there's a lot of balls moving in the air, but it can be done. So it's really a plan to get started in the process and key points to think about along the way.

Tyler Raible [00:09:08] It makes perfect sense. When I was reading through the guide, it does an excellent job of laying out step-by-step, different thought process, different groups that need to be involved, different stakeholders, and even different levels of challenge, for lack of a better word, going from beginner to intermediate to advanced. So how do you see agencies utilizing this resource or even the criminal justice system in general? How can they use this to improve their response to sexual assault?

Patricia Melton [00:09:32] Well, they can pick it up and really go through the guide, because, as you mentioned, it's broken into like these different categories. And then what it looks like to be kind of in a beginner status for each category, what it might look like to be an intermediate status for those categories, and what does it look like to be an advanced? And they can use it as a guide to say, like, where am I as an agency? Where am I at the multidisciplinary team? Where do we fall on this? And then from there say, OK, what steps do we need to take to move us to the next level? A lot of the time agencies that are approaching sexual assault response have done some of this already, but not all of it. They don't have the full picture. So it's really like take a look at this, figure out where you lay at - like map your actions onto this guide. And then what's missing are the things that you need to try to address, and there's key components in the guide to help you address them. There's steps in there to consider and ideas about where you can get additional resources to support those steps. So it really is to help lay out foundation and a plan. It is not the end-all to the problem. It's not going to solve everything, but it will get folks together and get them started and make them realize where the gaps are and open up those conversations to now that we have identified the gap and we even have some suggestions on how to address the gap. What are our actions? How are we going to implement these steps?

Tyler Raible [00:10:57] So, Pattie, when you say these gaps, are we talking about gaps in knowledge? Are we talking about gaps in expertise, about gaps in maybe people who are involved in the team? What do you mean specifically?

Patricia Melton [00:11:08] I think they can fall across all those categories you just mentioned, Tyler. I emphasize a lot of training in this guide because I think we have an assumption that folks are trained. And now we know so much more about the effects of trauma, for example, that we never knew 10 years ago, but we know so much more now. So it's important that folks get caught up to speed through training so that their thought processes and their actions and the policies and practices that they start to put together underneath their response to sexual assault are aligned with national recommendations and best practices, which this guide helps put together. So I think you can have gaps in knowledge. I think you can have gaps in across your disciplines. Who's doing what, what is their role? And are they doing their role to the effect that is needed to really support a healthy response to sexual assault? What are we doing to ensure the support for survivors? Do we have enough resources available? Sometimes resources aren't big yet. Right. There's a lot of agencies that can struggle with funding. They might know like, hey, I know I'm here and I know I need to get to this next step, but I can't get there because I don't have any funding. So there's suggestions when resources are limited in this guide, where can you go? What might be some of the other avenues? Yes, funding is a consideration, but how do you work with what you have and maybe get it in alignment? So sometimes the gap is a different perspective or a fresh look. You know, I call it the fresh eyes approach at what you already have and how and where you need to go.

Tyler Raible [00:12:43] So in terms of different perspectives and in terms of fresh view, as you put it, we spoke in previous episodes about the value of multidisciplinary teams, and this guide talks a lot about multidisciplinary advisory committees. Could you explain a little bit the difference between the two, just for my understanding and our listeners as well?

Patricia Melton [00:13:01] I created the multidisciplinary advisory committee as just a new name for something that you may already have or you may not. When you're working in sexual assault response reform. A lot of times there's sexual assault response teams, or SART, for example. There's other types of multidisciplinary teams or task forces that may be involved. The distinction that I make in the guide is that the multidisciplinary advisory committee or whatever you want to call it, your agency must be equipped with stakeholders that can actually enact and enforce changes in policy and practice. You need that representation. In other words, you need to be able to have stakeholders at the table who can put the teeth behind the changes you're trying to implement. Sometimes what happens on a multidisciplinary team or sexual assault response team is that team has great ideas and great suggestions for moving sexual assault response forward in their jurisdiction but lack the buy-in from the individuals that can really make it happen. And this guide really emphasizes if your multidisciplinary team or your multidisciplinary advisory committee, whatever you want to call it, doesn't have those individuals on it that can actually help implement the change, really have the buy-in from those key stakeholders that can uphold these policies and practices, then you need to get them involved because you'll spin your wheels way too much. So get them involved, you know, get their buy-in, bring them to the table. And that doesn't mean that they replace your SART or that they take it over. It's just a different group where you can take your information that you're already so fluent in and say we have these great ideas. We know this is the action we need to take. We need a policy that addresses, for example, how to effectively follow up on CODIS hit information when it comes in from testing sexual assault kits. Or we need a policy that really addresses the support to victims and survivors of sexual assault. How do

we engage with them and keep them engaged in these processes? Whatever those policies or practices are, you need a team that can actually make them actionable. So that's really the distinction that I brought out in the guide. It's really an awareness.

Tyler Raible [00:15:14] And that makes perfect sense because I could see where there would be a lot of, maybe not necessarily pushback, but you're not going to get as much traction if you don't have the right people in place. So in that mindset, once you have the right people in place, you can start moving forward through the guide. So what other key features of the resource would you like to highlight?

Patricia Melton [00:15:31] I think it's just important to recognize that the guide breaks down into some components I'm sure folks have always thought about, like sexual assault kit evidence tracking. How do we track sexual assault kits and associated evidence with it. In the guide, I really focused on sexual assault kits, but that doesn't mean I'm excluding other types of evidence. It's just to sort of simplify the guide. And then there's testing the sexual assault kits and then there's the investigative follow up and the prosecution of these cases. It's a linear flow, a workflow that makes sense to people. But when you start breaking apart the components to recognize where do we need the additional resources, where do we need the additional guidance? What action should we actually be taking? What policies and practices should we have in place at these different steps so that the whole process, the whole workflow, more effectively, is important? Those are the elements I tried to bring out in the guide. And there's suggestions for what evidence tracking should look like for sexual assault kits. What are some of the key aspects that should be there? How do we make it more efficient? And then same thing for prosecuting these cases. There's a lot of discussion in there about addressing the nuances that come up in sexual assault cases and why these cases are challenging to prosecute. But there's ways to move them forward, right? There's ways to keep the process going. But I do say that this is a criminal justice practitioner guide. And although it doesn't emphasize the level of advocacy, it is recognized. Everything in this guide is under the assumption that you have an engaged survivor of sexual assault who wants to stay engaged with the system. But it's important to respect their choices and to clearly give them choices. And this guide does talk about ensuring choices for survivors are available.

Tyler Raible [00:17:14] One thing that I found interesting, especially when you're talking about working with the survivor, is the concept of trust. It's brought up multiple times where a large part of what the MDAC is kind of involved with is building trust again with the survivor, building trust of the community. Can you speak a little bit about maybe the value of trust or the processes through which you can start to rebuild these relationships after they've been damaged in some capacity?

Patricia Melton [00:17:37] Right. Trust is a huge issue, especially, there's almost two phases to this, right? There's a sexual assault case that's moving forward. Right. You have a law enforcement investigator who's engaged with that victim, survivor of sexual assault. You have a victim advocate who's also engaged, and the case is moving forward. Then let's say it hits a bump and it's not going to be prosecuted. There's not enough to prosecute the case. How you have that conversation with that sexual assault survivor is so important because it can lead to mistrust. There can be a feeling of being let down or why is the system stopping? Why is the system failing? So there can be a break of trust there, but there can also be a break of trust when we have the sexual assault cold cases that were just never moved forward. And there's a variety of reasons why sexual assault cases were not moved forward. A lot of it does hinge on the fact that we did not understand the effects of trauma and we did not train our law enforcement to identify trauma, but we

couldn't train them for something we weren't aware of. But as we become aware of it, it has become so important to continue to train and really emphasize what a trauma informed investigation looks like and how to understand that sexual assault predators identify individuals that are vulnerable in many cases and breaking down some of these myths that surround sexual assault. Again, this is a complex situation, but all of those components lead to a break in trust. It leads to "I was sexually assaulted, and you did not believe me," you know, that's kind of where it goes down to the foundation. And so we've got to stop that process. We've got to take that back. We have to acknowledge that we have not addressed sexual assault effectively as a nation. We haven't. We have failed our sexual assault survivors in many ways as a nation. Now it's time to bring that all back. And we are bringing it back. We are turning that corner. But we have to recognize that there are barriers to trust there. There are communities that may not have a good relationship or trust relationship with the law enforcement in their communities based on different types of experiences. We have to acknowledge this. We have to recognize it and we have to address it. That's probably one of the biggest things that a multidisciplinary advisory committee needs to address. If trust is broken in my community, how do I reestablish trust and how do I get my message out that we made mistakes, yes, and we're owning up to them? But we are moving forward, and we are no longer going to be silent. We are going to work these cases in a way that has the best opportunity to bring justice to these cases.

Tyler Raible [00:20:23] I think the guide does a good job of that, especially when talking about the MDACs. There's recommendations for people who would join the committee that might not necessarily normally be part of a multidisciplinary team. There's recommendations for religious leaders or community organizers to maybe have a seat at the table. I mean, part of it is building trust, right? It's that level of transparency that's required. How do you think transparency factors into all of this?

Patricia Melton [00:20:48] Well, I think transparency is a huge, huge player in this. And I think your MDAC needs to be as large as it needs to be. I mean, you know, when I see multidisciplinary advisory committees that have larger teams and they do have clergy and other community stakeholders present, I think that's important because they're also part of the team that's communicating with all the individuals in the community, including sexual assault survivors and the families of them. They're engaged with the folks in your community. So use them to get your messages across, bring them to the table, help them with that message, because you can't cross all the bridges by yourself, so bring them all in. But I do think transparency is incredibly important. I've seen MDACs that have had town hall meetings where it's an open meeting to the public, to everyone in the jurisdiction, to come in, they present, but then they open the floor for questions and they take ownership of the questions. Sometimes those questions are pretty tough, right? Sometimes they're hard questions. Sometimes they're pointing the finger at you saying, "you failed me," you know. "As a member of your community, you failed me this way. How can I trust you?" And they have to answer to that. And I think that's important. And some of it is, "I realize that we didn't handle that well. I apologize. But let me tell you how this is, this is the new phase. This is what we're doing different. And sorry we didn't do it then, but we know now, and we are doing it now." You know, we can't erase the past, can't brush it away, but you have to acknowledge it. And I think making the distinction that you're moving forward and being very transparent, get that message out there, use social media, use some of these other platforms to let the community know that this is a change and the change is coming and we're dedicated to the change.

Tyler Raible [00:22:28] I love the sense of momentum that comes with this. The guide does a great job of trying to keep the ball moving. Right, trying to prevent stall outs. And I

think that's kind of the benefit of having that introductory into intermediate into advanced levels of the whole committee. One thing that you mentioned earlier that I do want to talk about a little bit was this concept of the victim centered kind of language. And in terms of the change for investigation, change for prosecution. But let's say there's an organization, an MDAC, that's doing really great with updating some of the five categories, but they're kind of struggling to succeed in other ones. Are there any recommendations? Is that covered in the guide, how they could potentially pick up some of these weak points and bolster them?

Patricia Melton [00:23:11] Yes, I mean, the guide really brings to the attention that no one is going to come in and be advanced across all of the categories discussed in the guide. In fact, when you map your own agency's actions onto the guide, you're going to find like, hey, this is something, you know, we're doing pretty good. We're at an intermediate status here. And this is something we are at ground zero. We haven't even started on this. We don't know what this looks like yet. So we recognize that in sexual assault response reform, most of us who, who work in the field, we see it every day and that's normal. The important thing is to kind of be honest with your self-assessment of your agency and, yes, find where you're at and how do I move forward? And the guide does kind of bring that together for you. And it's just suggestions, too. It's not to say that it is the complete answer. There might be jurisdictional nuances that you need to address that are not mentioned in the guide. But I will say that even if you are into the more advanced section of the guide, and you're like, hey, we've made such great progress on this and now we're advanced. You're not done. I don't think we'll ever be done. One of the things to think about as an advanced agency on any one of those components is personnel turnover, because you probably got to that point because you have some champions on your team and those champions are so impactful and so helpful. And when you lose them, what happens? You have to be prepared. Right. Because just as you mentioned, Tyler, you get the ball rolling and there is a momentum there and the ball must stay rolling. You don't ever want to become stagnant or stuck. So I think that's just important to think about. And it's a really good point that you brought up. I think agency, unfortunately, can never really get comfortable. There will continue to be challenges. And I think turnover is really a challenge that has to be addressed.

Tyler Raible [00:24:56] With the development of this guide, what kind of impact do you anticipate?

Patricia Melton [00:25:00] I think the guide is really going to help agencies identify where they are and where they need to go with their sexual assault response. I've got some great feedback from other stakeholders who found this incredibly helpful for them. So I do think that it has a positive impact to it. Turnover is something to be very concerned about. Whether you want to call it fatigue or burnout, but we do lose individuals in these fields and when you lose a champion because of burnout or something similar, that is very detrimental. So I think it's important for the agency to build into their plans levels of sustainability, which are not just policies, but also recognizing the self-care that is needed and being open to different avenues that support all of the practitioners who are working in this field, working so closely with our survivors of sexual assault, addressing this very violent crime. I think the guide touches on that. But I think probably the most impactful piece that this guide brings is if you are struggling with the question of where do we even start or we started and I don't think we're where we need to be, I think we can do better, then this guide, I think will really help with those questions.

Tyler Raible [00:26:19] As you put it, before, you know, there was a, there's a failing to really address this issue for a long period of time. And now, you know, in 2021, a year into a global pandemic, the climate is changing. So in terms of supporting survivors of sexual assault, is there anything the pandemic has brought to attention that's been positive? I know we talk a lot about negatives, but there has to be like some silver lining that we can pull from all this, right?

Patricia Melton [00:26:45] Definitely, the pandemic created a lot of additional challenges, but you're absolutely correct. There were moments that were true positive. I mean, first of all, overall, it demonstrated the resiliency of the stakeholders and practitioners associated with sexual assault because they didn't stop, and they will not stop. They said this is not going to stop us, right. We're going to continue. And one of the things that I thought was really important and I thought was really great was suddenly all the additional awareness campaigns that came out really getting the message out to sexual assault survivors that we didn't shut down because of the pandemic. We are here. I saw a lot of additional advertisements, if you will, from rape crisis centers coming out saying you're not alone because this pandemic did create additional stressors and additional isolation components that were incredibly difficult. But instead of that being, you know, a stopping point, it was - we're still here. You know, we are here for you. You can come in, you can talk to us. You can reach out to us. We still conducted sexual assault forensic exams. We still move forward. And I think that was a positive. But to me, the greatest positive was that message that we are not stopping. We are still here. Don't ever stop connecting with us either.

Tyler Raible [00:28:12] It is remarkably inspiring. If you think about it, just the fact that, as you put it, it's kind of a rallying cry, right? Everybody's moving forward. We're still, we're still doing exams. We're still investigating. Even when, when a lot of the world came to a grinding halt, there was still this effort to do good and to do right by this group of people who had been largely overlooked for an extended period of time.

Patricia Melton [00:28:35] It really was incredibly inspiring. I think it pulled a lot of us together. I think it also made us aware that we have to be ready and adaptable to change. I saw a lot of progress being made with, OK, we have the social distance and we have to put some of these additional precautions in place. What does that look like when I connect with my survivor of sexual assault? What does it look like for me as an advocate reaching back out? What does it look like for me as an investigator? So I think seeing all that move forward with really creative and impactful decisions and methodologies was incredibly important. Did things slow down? Sure, they did. And hopefully we'll be getting caught up. But I think it was incredibly inspiring to see that as a nation, we did come together and say in one united voice, this isn't going to stop us.

Tyler Raible [00:29:24] So in the vein of moving forward, of momentum, Pattie, what's next for you? Is there anything coming up that you're excited about? Any future projects, events, resources that you'd want to, that you want to share with us?

Patricia Melton [00:29:35] I think I am incredibly excited to get back involved with providing training sessions. Right now, everything is still virtual, which has been incredibly successful, I think more so than we thought. But I'm looking forward to getting back out there for in-person training events and really connecting with some folks that I haven't seen in a while. It's those side conversations that happen when you're walking from one meeting room to another or as you go to grab a cup of coffee and you spontaneously run into someone that sparks that creativity. That's where some of those most meaningful conversations take place. As far as, you know, how can I be helpful to that agency? There

might be a particular nuance or particular part of a case or a particular component of their policy that they want to talk one-on-one about, and that gives that opportunity to really engage with them and really support them. So I'm looking forward to that. I think a lot of people are looking forward to travel as well. So I'm excited about that.

Tyler Raible [00:30:36] I think everybody is looking forward to being able to travel again. I know I am. Unfortunately, Pattie, as much as I'd love to keep talking, we are running out of time together. So I want to make sure you get the last word in. Is there, are there any final thoughts you'd like to share with our listeners before we wrap up today?

Patricia Melton [00:30:49] I just want to say thank you to all of the amazing practitioners and stakeholders that work so endlessly to move these cases forward, but also to our sexual assault survivors. Wherever you are in your healing process, don't stop. Keep moving forward, keep becoming empowered and realize that justice is what justice means just to you and that that's OK. But I just have all the gratitude in the world for everyone working in this field.

Tyler Raible [00:31:25] I'd love to echo that sentiment. And I'd also like to thank you, Pattie, for a) all of the work you do in the realm of sexual assault, response reform, but also for sitting down with us today to discuss your new resource, the "Enacting an Improved Response to Sexual Assault; a Practitioner's Guide to Successful Sexual Assault Response Reform." So thank you, Pattie, for joining us today.

Patricia Melton [00:31:45] Thank you so much.

Tyler Raible [00:31:47] And if our listeners at home are interested in obtaining a copy of the guide, we're going to make sure to post a link to the PDF on our landing page. Also, if you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Just Science on your podcast platform of choice. For more information on today's topic and resources in the forensic field, visit forensiccoe.org. I'm Tyler Raible and this has been another episode of Just Science.

Voiceover [00:32:12] This concludes our Sexual Assault Awareness Month mini season. Stay tuned for our next series, where we discuss the National Institute of Justice's Forensic Science R&D portfolio. Opinions or points of views expressed in this podcast represent a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of its funding.