

Department of Psychology, College of Social Sciences

REBECCA CAMPBELL *(left)*

Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, Detroit, Michigan

PROSECUTOR KYM WORTHY *(right)*



The Community Engagement Scholarship Award honors Dr. Rebecca Campbell, professor in the Department of Psychology, and Prosecutor Kym Worthy of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office on behalf of the Detroit Sexual Assault Kit Action Research Project. Together, this multidisciplinary team worked tirelessly to bring justice to victims of sexual assault who had waited years for justice.

In August 2009, approximately 11,000 sexual assault kits (SAKs or rape kits) were found in a police property storage facility in Detroit, Michigan. A SAK contains biological evidence collected from victims' bodies after the assault that can be analyzed for DNA, which can be instrumental in solving crimes, prosecuting rapists, and preventing future attacks. However, the vast majority of the Detroit SAKs had never been submitted for forensic DNA testing; they had been stored and ignored for decades.

Prosecutor Worthy demanded action and reform. Together with Dr. Campbell and partners from the Michigan Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan State Police, and Wayne County SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners), they received a competitive federal grant from the National Institute of Justice to conduct a participatory action research project to address this problem. This grant was one of two awarded in the country to develop model national best practices for untested rape kits.

The partners in the Detroit Sexual Assault Kit Action Research Project worked together for five years to understand why so many rape kits had not been tested. They developed comprehensive testing plans to ensure that all rape kits were tested for DNA to provide justice to survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure that those who had been wrongly accused of a crime were cleared through DNA testing. They also created trauma-informed programs for survivors to support them as their cases were re-opened for investigation and prosecution.

The strategies and solutions developed in this project have been disseminated nationally to help other communities that have large numbers of untested rape kits and to prevent this problem from happening in other jurisdictions.

Promoting public safety and public trust are critical components of ongoing efforts for the revitalization of Detroit. The agencies in this partnership raised funds, increased public awareness, and extended compassion and care for victims of this horrific crime. The Detroit Sexual Assault Kit Action Research Project has been lauded as a national model of successful action research and an example of how multidisciplinary collaboration can inform social policy.

This project extended Dr. Campbell's research program on the criminal justice system's response to sexual assault. For the past twenty-five years, Dr. Campbell has conducted community-based research on gender-based violence, with an emphasis on sexual assault. Her research examines how contact with the legal and medical systems affects adult, adolescent, and pediatric victims' psychological and physical health. Dr. Campbell also conducts training for law enforcement and multidisciplinary practitioners in civilian, military, and campus community settings on the neurobiology of trauma.

This University-Community collaboration embodies Michigan State University's commitment as a land-grant university to develop solutions to society's most challenging problems. This partnership highlights how research can benefit social policy, and how community partners can transform scholarship through their voices and lived experiences. This project merits recognition for making a difference in the lives of rape survivors whose lives were harmed by violence by providing hope that justice will promote healing.