

Survivor-Centred Innovation in Forensic Evidence Collection

EXPLORING SELF-COLLECTION PATHWAYS FOR FORENSIC EVIDENCE PRESERVATIONS

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THE MISSION

To alter an alternative to current forensic DNA testing is conducted for victims of sexual assault, in a way that encourages survivors to come forward by giving them autonomy and preventing retraumatisation during the evidence collection process.

ABOUT ME

Evie Archer

I am a third-year **Biotechnology student** with a strong passion for women's health, and developing innovative, impactful solutions. Alongside my studies, I work in the Anatomical Pathology department at the **Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer (ACPCC)**, contributing to advancements in women's health.

As a **survivor of sexual assault who underwent forensic testing** while pursuing a police investigation, I've gained a unique perspective on the intersection of healthcare and the criminal justice system. This experience has strengthened my commitment to improving outcomes for survivors and bridging gaps between science, policy, and patient care, and I am dedicated to making a difference in this space knowing how this technology would have benefited me.

I am trying to build a team, made up of industry professionals across forensics, laboratory medicine, and advocacy groups, to undertake this project. It is not a small undertaking, but I believe that this is a relatively simple change that may make an astronomical difference to survivor experiences.

OUR PROBLEM

Current forensic DNA collection processes can be invasive, retraumatising, and inaccessible, often limiting survivor autonomy and failing to adequately support diverse reporting experiences and needs.

WHO IS IMPACTED BY THIS PROBLEM?



2M

489

90%

2 Million

Women have experienced sexual assault in Australia since the age of 15 (20% of the female population) (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

489

Medical examinations of people who experienced rape in 2023-2024 (Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Annual Report).

90%

Of sexual assaults reported to police in Victoria were not proven in court (Crime Statistics Agency Victoria)

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Current evidence suggests that current forensic procedures are distressing to survivors of sexual assault.

“Several young participants discussed feeling “traumatized,” “intimidated,” and “ashamed” during the examination procedure.”

“[One patient described how] the ‘examination lady’ was impatient and did the procedure ‘roughly’, without trying to comfort her young patient.”

“ I was crying on the bed, and it hurt me. . . And she just looked at me. Because she’s seen me crying and she just looked at me. She didn’t say anything. . .The other lady (the clinician), she was staring at me a lot”

Whitehouse, C., McKenzie, P., & Hobbs, C. (2026). The First 72 Hours After Child Sexual Assault: Reporting Children, Young People, and Mothers’ Experiences of Police, Hospital, and Psychosocial Care in Victoria. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 41(9-10), 1886-1910.

Self Collect DNA Swab



Nylon-flocked swab
for high forensic yield.



Self-collected immediately
following an **initial disclosure**
to appropriate authorities.

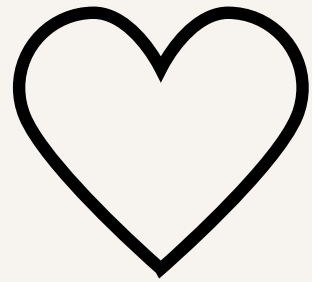


Essential components for
ensuring **DNA preservation**

Designed to be offered **in addition to**, rather than replace, clinician-collected samples by providing survivors with an additional option for evidence collection, particularly for those who may find traditional forensic examinations invasive or retraumatizing.

WHO ARE OUR STAKEHOLDERS?

SURVIVORS



empowerment, dignity,
autonomy

Privacy and autonomy, reduced
trauma from invasive exams,
conviction of perpetrator.

A survivor hesitant to undergo a
hospital examination feels more
comfortable self-collecting
evidence in a supportive setting.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS



efficiency, relief,
accessibility

Improved accuracy of samples,
reduced burden on emergency
staff, equitable access to tests.

A regional clinic can guide survivors
through self-collection, ensuring
evidence is preserved when
emergency care is not accessible.

JUSTICE SYSTEM



legitimacy, conviction,
justice

More quality evidence, more
cases referred to prosecution,
higher likelihood of conviction.

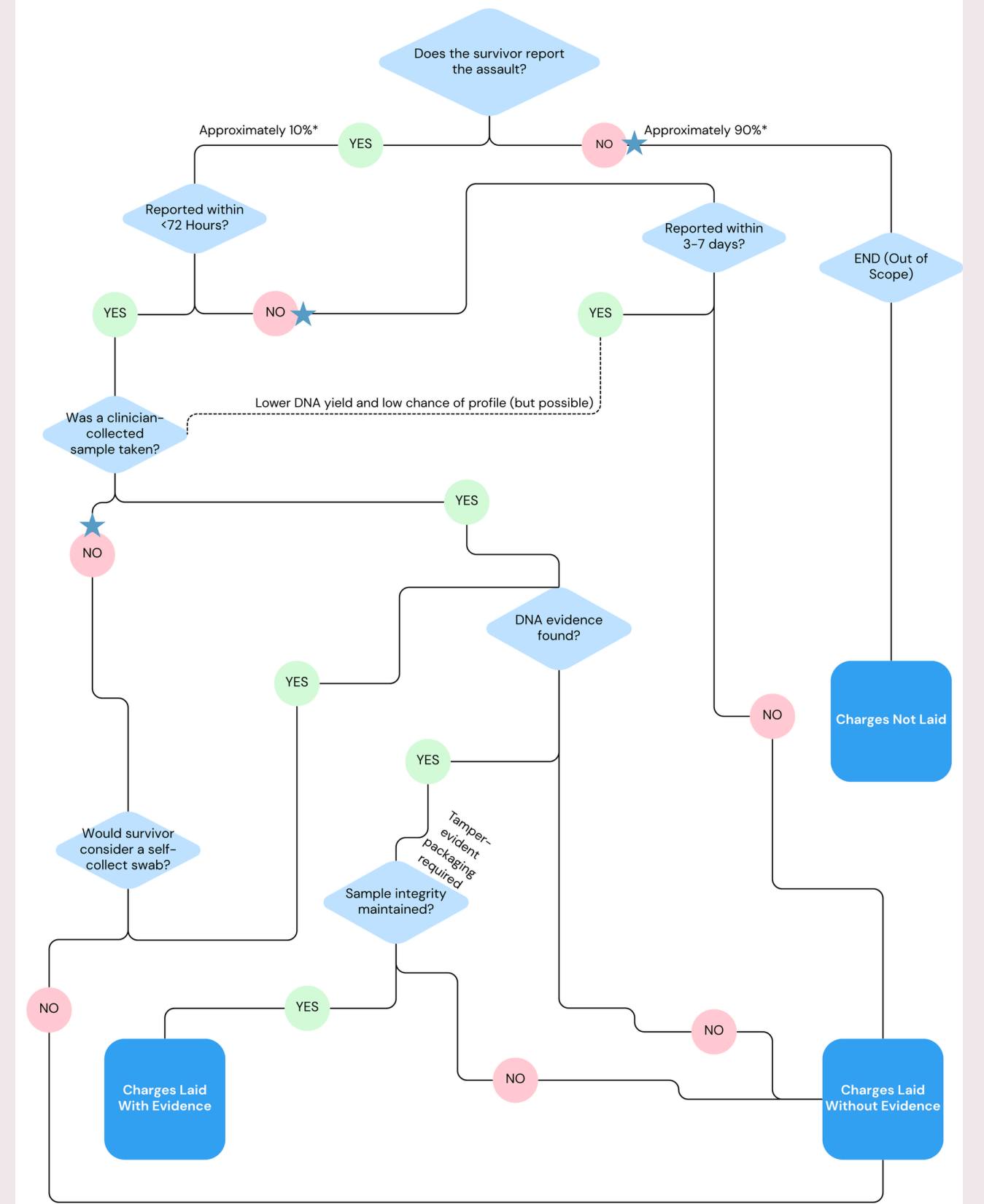
A case supported by strong
evidence enables easier conviction
with fewer challenges from the
defence.

IMPACT ON SURVIVORS

Self-collection options may support forensic evidence collection across multiple survivor pathways and reporting circumstances. In particular, this approach may provide additional support for:

- Survivors who currently choose not to report an assault to authorities.
- Survivors who are uncertain whether DNA evidence may still be recoverable due to delayed reporting or other factors.
- Survivors who choose to report an assault but are unable or unwilling to undergo a clinician-led forensic examination.

Pathways from Sexual Assault to Forensic Evidence Collection and Outcomes



* Sexual Assault Services Victoria. (2025). Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). <https://www.sasvic.org.au/saam>

★ Represent the points in the reporting process where self-collected swabs may be most beneficial.

R & D PIPELINE



NSW Health’s 2025 recognition of Early Evidence Kits and the FDA’s 2024 approval of self-collected HPV swabs demonstrate the legal and medical viability of self-administered DNA collection, **supporting the viability of a self-collected swab in this context.**

WHAT I NEED FROM SASVIC

Understanding Need

Conduct research to explore whether a self-collected forensic DNA kit could provide a meaningful and accessible option for survivors following sexual assault.

Assessing Outcomes

Examine how this approach may influence survivor experiences, reporting decisions, and broader justice outcomes, including whether charges are laid.

Equitable Access

Ensuring that the experiences of survivors who face systemic barriers to reporting, including those in rural and regional communities and Indigenous communities, are represented in this research.

Ethical Research

Ensuring this research remains survivor-focused and recognises the vulnerability of participants and the potential for research in this area to retraumatise or negatively impact wellbeing if not conducted with appropriate care and support.

Improving Outcomes

As an undergraduate student, I recognise the limits of my experience in bringing a project of this scale to life, and believe SASVic would be an invaluable partner in supporting the development of this work.

PROPOSED PATHWAY

YourSay

I will submit a proposal to the YourSay platform, ran by SASVic. Any advice on additional documents to add to my application or guidance on my application would be immensely appreciated.

Research

Discuss the potential for a paper that examines the usefulness of a self-collect swab for forensic examination in sexual assault survivors and it's impact on reporting to authorities and outcomes.

Connection

Connections to any individuals or organisations who may be able to support, guide, or collaborate on this project would be greatly appreciated, particularly those with experience in survivor-centred research, sexual assault advocacy. or criminal justice processes relating to sexual assault

Meeting

On this trajectory, I hope to bring together expertise and collaboration from the Melbourne Entrepreneurial Centre, the University of Melbourne, the Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer, SASVic, and other key individuals or organisations in this space.

Pilot Program

From a scientific and forensic perspective, a pilot program is feasible, though, it would need to be carefully designed to remain survivor-centred and supported by thorough research demonstrating both its effectiveness and validity in court, when charges are laid.

Thank you

FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT IN THIS PROJECT.