

Just Improved Response to Sexual Assault

Introduction [00:00:01] RTI International's Justice Practice Area presents Just Science.

Voiceover [00:00:08] 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 two of our 2023 Sexual Assault Awareness Month mini season, Just Science sat down with Dr. Julie Valentine, the Associate Dean of the Brigham Young University College of Nursing, to discuss the factors that contribute to low prosecution rates for sexual assault cases. In our last episode, Dr. Valentine highlighted the importance of sexual assault kit submission and DNA evidence as the groundwork for prosecution in sexual assault cases. Despite national efforts to improve the submission rate of sexual assault kits for forensic testing and to support the investigation of sexual assault cases, Dr. Valentine's research indicates that prosecution rates for sexual assault cases remain low. Listen along as Dr. Valentine discusses the challenges associated with resource allocation for improved sexual assault response reform, the outcome of her research related to prosecution rates for sexual assault cases, and how future legislation may positively impact response reform efforts. Dr. Valentine is also participating in the FTCOE's Sexual Assault Awareness Month webinar series. Go to ForensicCOE.org to register today. This episode is funded by the National Institute of Justice's Forensic Technology Center of Excellence. Some content in this podcast may be considered sensitive and may evoke emotional responses or may not be appropriate for younger audiences. Here's your host, Tyler Raible.

Tyler Raible [00:01:33] 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. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and in honor of this month, we're spending time with experts in the field to discuss emerging topics in the arena of sexual assault response reform. To help guide us in our conversation today, I'm joined by our guest, Dr. Julie Valentine, Associate Dean and Associate Professor at Brigham Young University in the College of Nursing, and Certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners with Wasatch Forensic Nurses. So, Julie, welcome back. It's great to see you again. It's great to talk. I'm really looking forward to picking up kind of where we left off.

Julie Valentine [00:02:08] Oh, thank you so much for having me back. There's so much to discuss and so much to do in this area.

Tyler Raible [00:02:15] There absolutely is. So, last week we started off with a brief discussion about your roles as an academic, a researcher, and a practicing sexual assault nurse examiner. So I'd like to shift gears a little bit and talk about how your work impacts prosecution. Can you give us a brief overview before we really dive into today?

Julie Valentine [00:02:33] When we look at why we do research, anytime you do research, you have to say, you know, so what? And now what? What do I do with this? And my feeling is that I do my research regarding sexual assault, specifically to do a couple of things. One, to impact practice, because if you impact practice, you improve care to survivors and I'm talking multidisciplinary practice, law enforcement, victim advocates, forensic scientists, the sexual assault nurse examiners, across the board. But then the next is also impact policy legislation. We get so far when we impact practice, where we really make substantial gains is when we impact policy and when we push to have evidence-based policy.

Tyler Raible [00:03:33] I love that. I especially like the concept of, so what, now what. Right? Because, you know, research, especially research like this, shouldn't happen in a vacuum. So as one of the premiere researchers working at this intersection between forensic DNA and sexual assault kits, would you agree that there have been many changes associated with submitting and testing the sexual assault kits? What's your perspective?

Julie Valentine [00:03:58] Oh, I believe, and I think that most would agree with me that this is one of the areas that we have made the most progress in, and specifically I'm talking about improving the submission rates of sexual assault kits and moving all sexual assault kits to have analysis. We have a number of programs that have helped with this process. One is the SAKI program, Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Program, which has helped to fund a lot of these changes. The other is the DANY Grant, which has really helped to fund for payment of previously unsubmitted kits. And also we have Joyful Heart Foundation as well as FTCOE, National Institute of Justice, RTI, tons of different researchers that have all really come together and media and the general public to push for submission and testing of all sexual assault kits. I know in Utah this was one of my earlier research studies, and this was back in 2011, no one was really looking at, so how many of these collected sexual assault kits are actually submitted to crime lab? We weren't tracking that information at all. And I will say that most states weren't tracking this information. And I did a pilot study and found that out of 988 kits that were collected in a certain time period, only 20% were submitted. We then expanded that study to look at most of the state. We found that only 36 were submitted and we found that the primary reason for this low submission and the differences between jurisdictions were subjective findings or implicit and explicit biases. We found two counties that were right next to each other. One was submitting 40% of their sexual assault kits. The neighboring county was submitting 4%. So we focused our research efforts on how many of the sexual assault kits are getting submitted and what are the predictors of kit submission. And that's when we exposed the many biases. That research study had a lot of media attention as other research studies on this topic of sexual assault kit submission did and led to legislative changes. In 2017, representative Andrew Romero in Utah sponsored House Bill 200, which mandates the submission and testing of all sexual assault kits. So we have gone from statewide of 38% being submitted to about 98 to 99% of sexual assault kits submitted. So we found a huge impact from research on policy, and this is not just in Utah but across the country.

Tyler Raible [00:07:02] Julie, I think those numbers are really interesting. I'm curious about these neighboring counties that had 36% differences in submission rates. In this research, were there any standout factors that seemed to have an impact on submission and testing rate? Was it strictly legislation based or were there other factors involved that had an impact?

Julie Valentine [00:07:26] There were definitely other factors involved. Some jurisdictions really had the belief that it's going to cost money to submit these kits. It doesn't cost law enforcement any money. They really held back on submitting kits because of false assumptions or narrative that really did not hold true. Quite honestly, I'm going to dive into this a little bit more later, but I'm going to throw it out there right now, the number one rape myth is that there are a lot of false reports in sexual assault cases. And unfortunately, believing that myth permeates every aspect of when we are trying to make changes and decrease sexual violence. And so certainly that played a factor. We found that outside of site and jurisdiction, the next factor is if it was individuals with male genitalia victim, they

were more likely to submit the kit than those with female genitalia. That article was published in 2016 and Journal of Interpersonal Violence.

Tyler Raible [00:08:36] So, Julie, we have everybody coming together to work on this national issue. So why are these changes, and including the legislation related to submission and testing of the kits, why are these changes so important in the grand scheme?

Julie Valentine [00:08:51] The legislative changes related to sexual assault kits are a start. There is a lot more to do, but it acknowledges that testing sexual assault kits is using science to establish justice. When I talk about justice, and we talked about this in the last episode, we're not just talking about justice for the victim. We are talking about overall justice. And I shared that we in our - we have a large database of sexual assault kits and the findings from those, and we have found that about 2% of the DNA analysis findings actually exclude a suspect in which we had a standard or a DNA sample from that suspect. So testing sexual assault kits truly is for our entire society. This is acknowledging that we can use science to make safer and healthier communities by testing the sexual assault kits. And then here's the kicker, then using those findings to help us improve our criminal justice system response.

Tyler Raible [00:10:04] I think that's incredible because it takes a very holistic approach to addressing the core problem. In your experience as a researcher, do you feel that we've made similar changes to positively impact the actual case investigation? Not necessarily just the submission and testing analysis of a kit, but the case investigation itself.

Julie Valentine [00:10:25] So our research, what we have found is that we have this huge upward curve of sexual assault kit submission and testing from 36% up to 99%. We have done research on the prosecution outcomes in sexual assault cases over that same time period that we completely change and escalated the submission of these kits and we have found very minimal change in the actual criminal justice system outcome, meaning cases that are prosecuted. There is a researcher at Arizona State University, as soon as I saw the title of her article, I knew I would love this article and it's Dr. Cassia Spohn, and she said the title of the article is Sexual Assault Case Processing: the more things change, the more they stay the same. And sadly, we are seeing that in many degrees. We have made in Utah, I have used the National Institute of Justice Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Practitioner Toolkit. Long name, but really a pretty simple statistical package that was developed by Dr. Rebecca Campbell at Michigan State University and colleagues and is available through the National Institute of Justice. I highly recommend that communities all over use this toolkit to look at their criminal case outcomes. But we found that with so much attention and money and media attention and policy changes, legislation that has driven this increase in sexual assault kit submission, our policy changes and our money and our attention on the criminal justice system response has been pretty minimal. So we not only are seeing flat lines on prosecution or only minimal improvements, we are also seeing increasing rates of sexual violence by our current numbers. Some of our listeners may be aware that the CDC released a report recently on the mental health of our teenagers and really focused especially on teenage girls, and found reports of increased sexual violence, which is negatively impacting their mental health. So we need to maintain our focus on, yes, these sexual assault kits need to be submitted, but now where is our next focus? And I believe our next focus is on improving prosecution.

Tyler Raible [00:13:15] Julie, there's an incredible amount of content to unpack here. First and foremost, I want to give a shout out once again to this NIJ document, this guide. We'll

post a link on the landing page for this episode. So it's great to hear that that it's being utilized so effectively. And I think what I'm wrestling with is kind of the counterintuitive nature of the way things are progressing. So we have all this positive change in terms of supporting victims. On a previous episode of the show, we've spoken to members of law enforcement about, you know, trauma informed, victim centered interviewing and making sure that we take care of survivors, we've spoken to survivors. Between that and your work with increasing the amount of submission rates and there just seems like there are all of these positive things happening, and it seems counterintuitive then that we wouldn't see an increase in the prosecution rate. What I really am interested in hearing more about is do you have any insight as to why they're not increasing?

Julie Valentine [00:14:19] Well, of course I'm going to share my ideas and I just want to acknowledge upfront these are, you know, my own. Not NIJ's or FTCOE's or anyone else. But they are grounded in our research findings, and I'll share a bit more about our research findings in a bit as well. We have made substantial gains and I think understanding of the importance of trauma informed investigations. And for those who may not be aware of that, that is providing education to law enforcement about the impact of trauma. In this case, specifically sexual assault trauma on victims' behaviors, actions and words. That rather than looking at victims' behavior, actions and words as possibly lying or making things up, they realize that this difficulty describing a linear path of what happened to them or being able to clearly state what happened to them is actually a sign of trauma. And then how do you approach someone who has been impacted by this trauma to interview them? Law enforcement, most of their interview techniques are based on interviewing suspects. So how do you switch gears? So we know that we have some really excellent protocols. Some of the challenges, and this is based in our community, what we've seen is, although we have these really excellent protocols, we have seen a lot of turnover in law enforcement. So we may look at an agency and say, well, this agency got training and trauma informed investigation two years ago. But then when you actually do a deeper dive, maybe those detectives are all new that are working in SVU and have not gotten that same level of training. This isn't a one and done you know, mark a checklists, that organization has received training, that's not how this works. We are really talking about a culture shift and that takes a while. Another thing that I know in Utah, and I think in many parts of the United States, is that law enforcement has really taken a beating. And this is for many factors. But because of this, we see law enforcement officers with really large caseloads. And I mean, I think we can all relate to this, right? Even if you are a waitstaff at a restaurant, right? If you have 20 tables you're waiting on and one of the tables, you're taken so long, they get up and leave, you might think, oh, well, that reduces my workload, right? I don't have to wait on that table anymore. It's really hard to give that attention. And I work with so many amazing law enforcement officers that really struggle to have the resources that they need. And so when you don't have those resources and you have this heavy caseload, it's difficult to follow up with all of them and then to get that additional training. So part of it is built in to law enforcement investigation. Another aspect is we've done a lot of focus about trauma informed training with law enforcement, not as much as trauma informed training with prosecutors' offices. So that's another aspect that needs to be addressed.

Tyler Raible [00:18:02] I'm really interested in unpacking a little bit this point you highlighted that I'm kind of referring to is training versus like an integration into the culture. I've had some actual conversations with members of law enforcement who have mentioned that the best way that they've been able to introduce this victim centered approach is by repeated exposure and using mentorship. You know, having a more senior investigator taking the junior investigators out and showing them how it's done, and then

kind of reversing the role and letting them lead. Do you think, then, that instead of, you know, if Jurisdiction X had the training in 2018, would it be better suited as kind of an onboarding package in the same way that they would discuss different traditional protocols within their jurisdiction?

Julie Valentine [00:18:53] I think that's an excellent idea, Tyler. We just always have to go back to, well, what are the resources that that agency has, right? Some agencies may have resources to do that, but that does take money and it does take time. So how do we create these culture shifts in those agencies also that don't have the money or the time? I'm going to throw out a couple of research numbers that we found in Utah. So I implemented in the largest county in Utah, Salt Lake County, and this is a published study, the National Institute of Justice tool kit that I referenced earlier, and this was only looking at cases where the victim had a fully collected sexual assault kit. The victim said, I want to prosecute my case, I want to talk to law enforcement, and the victim was 18 years or older. And we found, again, fully collected sexual assault kit, they wanted to prosecute their case, we found that 6% of those cases were prosecuted. 6%. One of the first numbers that we collected, though, was how many of the cases did law enforcement screen with the prosecutor's office. Because then we get an idea of how many of these cases they just stopped at law enforcement. And so this was back in 2013, and we were looking at cases from 2003 to 2011, and we found that law enforcement screened a little over a third, 34% of the cases. Well, we did a lot of focus on investigation, a trauma informed investigation and the importance of involving prosecution earlier and screening cases, etc., and I work with a lot of wonderful detectives, SVU detectives, and they'd say, we're screening all of our cases now with the prosecutor's office. Well, then I did the study, and this was a couple of years ago, and we're sending this in for publication now, and found that we went from 34% screened with the prosecutors to 35%. It's all in how you define they were screening all the cases that they felt should be screened. But the majority of those cases were still being dismissed. When I then met with these detectives to talk about these findings and these police chiefs, a lot of it boiled down to resources. And that's when I really thought, and I haven't done research specifically on the resources, but I identified that that really is a substantial factor. If we want to reduce sexual violence, we need to improve our criminal case outcome. To improve our criminal case outcomes, we need to make sure that we have resources for law enforcement and prosecutors' offices and that we have policies within those agencies that support trauma informed principles. Because if we have policies, hopefully then those funds will be matching, and I think then we will start to see a shift in the law enforcement agency's ability to respond.

Tyler Raible [00:22:10] I want to talk more about the findings of this study, and I think it's time we transitioned to research here. So in this study and other research that you've conducted in this kind of arena, what else have you found kind of associates or has an impact on the prosecution rates aside from resource availability?

Julie Valentine [00:22:28] I'd love to talk - shift into research. This is what adds the bounce to my step. I love to talk about research. So specifically, what we found in our study, now, again, this is a retrospective study and we followed the toolkit to the tee, which again, I highly recommend jurisdictions do this. Unfortunately, the way that law enforcement agencies track data, they rarely, I actually, I don't know of any that would follow a case from the time it is reported. Rather, they follow a case from when they have charges filed or launch an investigation. So I'm going to compare this, I'm a nurse. If someone walks into a health clinic and has a sore throat, they're immediately coded. They have a sore throat. And so you can run statistics and say, what's the percentage of patients that we came in for with a sore throat? But law enforcement tracking is different,

and that's why this tool kit is very helpful, and maybe things will change with law enforcement, but generally and law enforcement, if we ask what are your numbers of how many people reported a sexual assault case to you? For many agencies, that is difficult to get that number. What they can do is how many had charges, how many were screened with the prosecutor, those things. But the overall number is tough. Okay, so now I'm going to jump in to what we found. We were able to look at those cases that were prosecuted and look at those variables that impacted the prosecution and we found several variables that were helpful in being associated with prosecution. We then did a statistical analysis to look at, all right, do we have some variables that are much more important and actually can predict prosecution? And so we had this random sample from these two largest counties in Utah, and we found when we combined those two counties, we actually only had one variable that predicted if a case was prosecuted and it predicted it 3.5 times more likely to be prosecuted if the victim was asleep and woke up to being raped or sexually assaulted. That was our only variable. So let's dig a little deeper and see what does that mean? Well one is, if you only have one variable and we've got a whole bunch of variables that we looked at, if you only have one variable, you have to consider there's a lot of subjective variables that we are not measuring. Our variables were all related to the actual assault, the injuries the victims sustained, background on the injuries, was there strangulation, was there drugs or alcohol used? All of those things. We looked at all of those. The fact that the only variable that predicted if a case was prosecuted was if the victim was asleep and woke up to being sexually assaulted. Think about that. If you're asleep, you're an incredibly vulnerable state, but you're also not engaged in any victim blaming behavior. You're not making out with the person at the time. You're not out partying at the time. You're seen as incredibly vulnerable. There is a term sometimes used called "righteous victim." We think those victims that are asleep and wake up to being sexually assaulted, that there is implicit bias in the criminal justice system, that those are more righteous victims. And those cases are more likely to be prosecuted. 3.5 times more likely to be prosecuted.

Tyler Raible [00:26:37] That is an incredible number. Am I correct in making the connection here that this is where those assault myths, those rape myths come into play?

Julie Valentine [00:26:48] Absolutely. It can be difficult. We do have some really good research out there that dives into what are myth endorsements across the criminal justice system, but we have to look at what degree of subjectivity is happening in these cases.

Tyler Raible [00:27:07] I'm blown away by that. Real quickly, I'm interested to know what other factors have been included. You'd mentioned sort of kind of behavioral ones. You mentioned the state of the survivor and the injuries they might have sustained. Could you give us like a brief overview of some of the other factors that were being brought into consideration when you were looking at the coding and all of the research associated with it?

Julie Valentine [00:27:30] We kind of divide our variables into factors related to the victim. So everything from age, race, did they self-disclose mental illness? Had they used alcohol or drugs? So all of those descriptive demographics and demographics of the victim. You also - the characteristics of the assault; was it suspected drug facilitated? Was there strangulation? Was the victim grabbed or held? How many injuries did the victim sustain? Now I will say in this dataset that 70% of the victims had documented non-anogenital injuries and 48% had documented anogenital injuries. Between those two counties in this newer study, we went from 6% in the largest county in Utah to 8%. So we did make improvements. And again, I'll go back to we didn't make improvements with how many

cases were screened with prosecutor's office. The prosecutor's office in Salt Lake County made the improvements. They are prosecuting more of the cases. The other county, we had 10% prosecuted. But I'll go back to this is about 18% of the victims were strangled, 70% had non-anogenital injuries, a little less than 50% had anogenital injuries, they all had a fully collected sexual assault kit, they all said they wanted to prosecute. Between 8 to 10% were prosecuted. If that doesn't spell out that we have a lot of work to do, I don't know what other numbers would. And it's not just on education and training and setting up institutional policies. Now we need to look at what legislative policies can we impact to improve prosecution rates.

Tyler Raible [00:29:16] Julie, I'm wrestling and kind of digesting all of these numbers and I think that, as you put it, it does highlight, you know, the amount of work left to be done. And, you know, seeing improvement in any capacity is positive. You know, baby steps are still steps in the right direction. Before we go on, I'm very curious to know about the actual data collection process. So how do you go about researching something as kind of nebulous as a prosecution rate?

Julie Valentine [00:29:46] This is where the power of the NIJ statistical toolkit comes in. Even if someone is not a researcher, I promise you every jurisdiction could utilize this toolkit. It walks those who implement the toolkit. It has a step-by-step process. I actually had to approach it in two different ways for the counties that I did this with. I had an institutional review board through my university and also through a healthcare institution where I collected some of the data. I had an MOU in one county with the prosecutor's office. So the prosecutor's office worked with us in retrieving the information for us to pull into our dataset. And the other county, the prosecutor's office was not interested in collaborating on this, and so we set up individual MOUs with the law enforcement agencies in that county. So, you're thinking a memorandum of understanding, which is the MOU, I mean, I had to establish 14 of them, but that's a lot of legwork, yes. But the benefit to doing research like this is then you increase collaboration, right? You help to bring people together. And so, yes, this is quite a bit of work, but it is worth it and I think it's really important that we know these numbers. So we would gather this data. I have a larger dataset that has information from the sexual assault medical forensic exam forms, and that's where I could connect the prosecution outcomes. And this is public record. We would use court docketing systems and connect that with the information that we had in our larger dataset to analyze the variables that are associated with prosecution.

Tyler Raible [00:31:47] The amount of inter organizational collaboration that happened as a result of all of this work, and this is, to be frank, kind of a Herculean effort, right? This was a lot to get done. What drew you to the topic of prosecution rates in the first place?

Julie Valentine [00:32:05] Well, as a forensic nurse, you see patient after patient. I see individuals whose lives are shattered. I see individuals as my patients that I worry their lives will never be the same. And as a nurse, a forensic nurse specifically, we generally only see a patient for that limited time where we do an examination after a sexual assault. So you think what has happened to my patients? And that's what drew me to this research. I wanted to look at what is happening with these kits, all this evidence we collect. But then what is happening with our patients in terms of what's happening with these cases? I had probably done 200 cases when I first wanted to explore prosecution rates, and I had gotten one subpoena. That meaning I only knew of one of my cases that had moved forward into the court system. What is happening in these cases? That's what made me want to research this.

Tyler Raible [00:33:13] It's a really compelling mix of curiosity and compassion. And, Julie, you mentioned a little bit ago, and it kind of stuck out in my mind that one of the things that maybe needs to improve or to be done yet is affecting a proper legislation. So from following your work, I know that you've written and you've been a part of several legislative bills. So can you tell us a little bit about that experience and maybe what you've learned about the impact of legislation on sexual assault response reform?

Julie Valentine [00:33:48] I'd be happy to talk about legislation. I think now my research really is driven to impact policy as much as practice, maybe even more so because that's where we see the bigger change. We can take, for example, this research that I did on the low submission rates of sexual assault kits. If we had not had that research, one, that really was the foundation that I used to write the SAKI and the DANY grants with colleagues, but two, we had a media attention about, hey, all these sexual assault kits are getting collected and then not submitted. So we had evidence to show our low submission rates that then informed writing that legislation and passing that legislation. So that was highly successful. I have also been involved in legislation that has not been highly successful, and that's what I'm going to talk about next, and that is legislation to impact prosecution. So I have worked with a great attorney and a law professor, Paul Cassell in Utah, and he's well known in this field. And in Utah, as in other states, we have forcible rape and it still is called forcible rape in Utah is a felony one. And then when you have to look at, what is the bar to be able to convict someone of that felony one count? In our state, one of those, a biggie, is to show lack of consent. Meaning that they said no or indicated by actions, no. Well, I'm going to circle back to when we talked about education about trauma informed investigation. What we know from trauma is that many victims of sexual assault have a freezing effect. That effect means, and I think this goes back, I have a lot of other studies where I've got more info on this, but that effect means that they may be unable to speak to say no. They may have so much fear about what's going to happen next that at a certain point they try to struggle to get away, but then they freeze, they shut down. And so we have cases, generally in sexual assault cases there's just two people there, where it's really difficult to prove that they said no. So what we have proposed three years in a row, we took a break this year, but it's actually legislation from Wisconsin and it's affirmative consent legislation. Wisconsin has had this in the books for more than two decades, and it has worked incredibly well there, where you have felony one forcible rape. The next step that we have in Utah right now is misdemeanor sexual battery. Well, more than a third of the sexual battery cases are actually pleas from felony one. So you go from felony one to a misdemeanor. The challenge is that misdemeanors, they don't go into CODIS, they don't go into any kind of sexual offender database and really, it's not much punishment at all to have a misdemeanor. What we have proposed is that we have a felony three, which is sexual penetration without consent. Our prosecutors and our law enforcement across the state have all been on board with this. We feel that that would allow us to prosecute many more cases. And there is a benefit to prosecuting not just for the victim, but also for an offender, because if you prosecute, then they get mandated therapy, right? We identify this is an offender and therapy is very effective. There is a missed belief out there that it's not. It is in sexual assault cases. And so you get that offender. So the overall impact would be one, you identify and prosecute more offenders, you will then have healthier and safer communities. So we have tried to pass this three times. We're going to be back at it again because we really believe that this is where we need to go. Every state needs to look at what is our legislation regarding, how does that impact the prosecution rates of sexual assault cases? And what can we do to decrease sexual violence through policy in our state?

Tyler Raible [00:38:37] Julie, there's so much about this progression that I find inspiring. Over this time, do you feel as though your primary objectives have changed, as you know, in regard to what impact you hope to have in the field?

Julie Valentine [00:38:53] In about 2007, my professional goal became to decrease sexual violence. That has been my North Star. It's what guides me when I take care of patients. I think about we know that when someone's been sexually assaulted once, their higher vulnerability for being sexually assaulted again. So it impacts my care of my patients. It impacts my research and what I devote myself to in research and then impacts how do we take this research, going back to the so what and now what, and making sure it matters. Saying now what? Because I don't know if I'm going to reach my goal of decreasing sexual violence, but I'm going to continue to try to reach this goal and it really is through every layer of my work as a forensic nurse and as a researcher.

Tyler Raible [00:39:51] I'm always just so in awe of all of the things that you do. And I know you have a webinar coming up with the FTCOE to discuss prosecution rates in more detail, and we'll include a link to that on the landing page for this episode as well. Can you tell us a little bit about what else you have going on right now? I know you have just so many irons in the fire.

Julie Valentine [00:40:16] We're wrapping up a large study on non-fatal strangulation in sexual assault that we think will have a lot of impact. We have a really huge study on injury, anogenital and non-anogenital injury in sexual assault that we're hoping to get out soon. I have a National Institute of Justice grant developing a machine learning model, sexual assault kit evidence testing. We are actually relooking at a lot of our data and analysis because we just finished coding a whole bunch of new cases and looking at both that for individuals with female genitalia and those with male genitalia because we found profound gender differences. But, you know, the bottom line is if we're going to make changes, if I'm going to try to reach my goal of decreasing sexual violence, it really involves so many different aspects. So I'm trying to identify what might have the most impact right now and go through those one on one.

Tyler Raible [00:41:19] There's definitely no shortage of work to be done. So, Julie, I want to give you the final word here. What message do you have for the community? You know, what impact do you want to make?

Julie Valentine [00:41:31] I would say, you know, the final words are to believe survivors, believe victims. When we think about how are we going to decrease sexual violence? In my mind, there's two things we need to do. One, we need to create cultures and environments where survivors feel comfortable coming forward to report, and that means we need to believe them. And then two, once they report, we support survivors, and we improve our criminal justice system process. If we could focus on those two aspects, I think we can start to make a difference.

Tyler Raible [00:42:10] Julie, I think you've already started to make a difference. But, thank you so much for taking the time out of your day, you know, twice this month now to sit down with me and with Just Science to discuss all of your research and the work that you've got going on in the arena of sexual assault response reform. So thanks for being on the show. It's always absolutely wonderful to get to sit down and talk to you.

Julie Valentine [00:42:30] Great to talk with you and I hope the listeners out there feel like, all right, what am I going to do to decrease sexual violence? Because it's going to take all of us.

Tyler Raible [00:42:39] For those of you listening at home, be sure to like and follow Just Science on your favorite platform. For more information on today's topic and other resources in the forensic field, visit ForensicCOE.org. I'm Tyler Raible, and this has been another episode of Just Science.

Voiceover [00:42:55] Next week, Just Science sits down with Tramps Gooding, Jennifer Pollock and Orlando Salinas to discuss familial DNA searching to resolve sexual assault cases. 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.