



NYPD



A Forward-Looking Plan for the
Special Victims Division
May 2022

Introduction

The NYPD is committed to effectively investigating crimes and supporting survivors of sexual assault. That commitment extends to sexual assault cases, which are handled by the Special Victims Division (SVD). The Special Victims Division is housed within the Department's Detective Bureau, and aims to resolve these cases effectively and efficiently, while also helping survivors and their families receive the support they need.

SVD's members take their roles very seriously within the Department, and demonstrate consistent commitment to supporting and improving responses to sexual assault cases. The Department follows up with survivors about their cases in a timely manner, and maintains manageable caseloads for all investigators to assure a high level of investigation. SVD also regularly engages with survivor advocates and District Attorneys to ensure their voices are heard and understood during the investigation process.

While there is much that SVD does well, the NYPD is always seeking to improve its operations as it relates to sensitive cases and supporting sexual assault survivors. With the generous support from the New York City Police Foundation, the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) was hired to perform an independent assessment of the Department's proficiency and capacity in responding to and investigating adult sexual assault cases.

RTI's assessment team was composed of criminologists, prosecutors, survivor advocates, forensic scientists, and current and retired police personnel. RTI reviewed Department policy and training, interviewed dozens of NYPD employees and outside stakeholders, and analyzed 150 case files to better understand the Department's approach to adult sexual assault cases.

The NYPD has already undertaken some immediate changes to its approaches to sexual assault cases, and has created the following plan to ensure the Department is constantly improving the way we serve the public.

Recent Enhancements

The Department has implemented and continues to work on numerous initiatives in order to improve how it responds to and investigates sexual assault cases. These improvements, some of which are highlighted below, impact how cases are investigated and how survivors of sexual assault are served.

Trauma-Informed and Investigations Trainings

The Department recently partnered with Thomas Tremblay Consulting & Training to deliver their Trauma-Informed Sexual Assault Investigations Training, a national standard for investigating and managing crimes of sexual assault. The training emphasizes respectful and professional communication with survivors of trauma and abuse. Training components include, but are not limited to: Recognizing survivor trauma and applying trauma-informed approaches to minimize the effects of trauma on the survivor, and examining the myths, rape culture, and potential biases around sexual assault and its impact on investigations.

SVD Facilities with a Survivor-Centered Approach

The Department is committed to providing survivor-centered spaces in its facilities, and has ongoing projects to improve them. In 2019, the NYPD opened a newly renovated space for the Manhattan Special Victim Squad at 137 Centre Street and relocated the Squad from their previous location at PSA5. The space includes designated child-friendly waiting room space, designated survivor interview rooms, aesthetic improvements, and new furniture for survivors and employees. An additional floor in 137 Centre Street has been allocated to continue expanding to include space for collocation of the District Attorney and advocates for survivors. Renovations have also been made in existing spaces in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Queens facilities. These facilities now all have designated survivor spaces, seating for advocates, and other aesthetic enhancements. The Department continues to work with the NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) to identify more appropriate facilities to house long-term SVD operations in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens and to provide additional co-located services whenever possible. Currently, the Department and DCAS are exploring new survivor-centered facilities in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Staffing Improvements and Specified Assignments

At the end of 2021, there were 248 investigators assigned to the Special Victims Division, including 121 investigators assigned to the adult squads in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, and the squad located in Staten Island that investigates both child abuse and adult crimes. Notably, this is a 78% increase over 2018 (67), as cited in a 2018 report from the Department of Investigation. An additional 76 investigators are assigned to the NYPD's dedicated Child Abuse Section in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. Moreover, 19 investigators are assigned to solely investigate sex crimes that occur in the transit system. The remainder are assigned to other units focused on cold cases, monitoring registered sex offenders, and analytics.

Drug-Facilitated Investigations Team

The Department's drug-facilitated investigation teams specialize in investigating instances of sexual assault when drugs are used. Investigators who have distinguished themselves in the Special Victims Divisions have been specially selected for this unit. Drug-facilitated investigations teams help improve investigatory capabilities at the borough level, enhancing the Department's ability to resolve cases effectively.

Next Steps

In 2021, the NYPD partnered with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to provide a comprehensive assessment of its approach to adult sexual assault cases. This detailed assessment provided the Department with the information it needed to develop a forward-looking plan to improve its practices and continue to be a leader in investigating sexual assault cases.

Policy and Procedure

The NYPD has many procedures it must follow in order to ensure cases are effectively managed. The Department currently has Patrol Guide and Detective Guide policies related to SVD and its investigative practices, and the Department is committed to streamlining and improving these policies. Additionally, Department-wide, the NYPD seeks to appoint dedicated investigators to ensure that the best and brightest members are acknowledged and promoted.

Recommendation

The NYPD should create and implement an agency-wide comprehensive sexual assault policy, starting from initial contact with the victim through the investigative process and case resolution.

NYPD Commitment

Create a guidebook that provides members with direction and expectations to establish a more consistent and standardized response to sexual assault. This document may include:

- Guidance on survivor advocacy and informing survivors of their rights.
- Information related to the NYPD Sexual Assault Hotline.
- Information about sexual assault crime scene management, evidence collection, and forensic medical care.
- Detailed directions for patrol responders including, but not limited to, acquiring statements, expectations of follow-up activities, information on trauma and associated responses, and coordination between patrol officers and SVD investigators.
- Enhanced guidance for detectives around expectations for proper report documentation, protocols on the location and circumstances around the survivor interviews and investigative follow-up.
- Guidance for 911 dispatch interactions with survivors.

Projected Completion Date: Q4 2022

Recommendation

Create and implement a standardized process outlining the selection, retention, promotion, onboarding, and performance reviews for SVD members.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will develop a formal process for assigning and onboarding investigators and supervisors to SVD to ensure there is a clear understanding of expectations and training requirements.

Projected Completion Date: Q3 2022

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will solicit feedback from advocacy partners prior to selecting a new Commanding Officer of the Special Victims Division.

Projected Completion Date: Q2 2022

Training

The NYPD is always looking for ways to enhance its trainings by exploring new information, courses, and methods for teaching recruits and officers about how to best conduct themselves while on the job. Specifically, with regard to sexual assault cases, the Department has a renewed focus on ensuring all officers have a clear understanding of what makes these cases unique, and how they can be most productively engaged and investigated.

Recommendation

Develop and deliver a stand-alone academy training module or section that is exclusively focused on responding to sexual assault incidents.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will provide a dedicated sexual assault module during recruit training. The module will be approximately 3 hours long.

Projected Completion Date: Q2 2022

Recommendation

Develop and deliver an in-service sexual assault training for all NYPD personnel who have interactions with survivors of sexual assault (e.g., hotline staff, communications, precinct reception personnel).

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will develop an in-service training that will be available for all members of service that may have an interaction with a survivor of sexual assault, including civilian members of service such as 911 operators.

Projected Completion Date: Q1 2023

Recommendation

Mandate specialized and continuing training for all SVD investigators and supervisors in the aspects of sexual assault response.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will enhance and improve training for all investigators and supervisors assigned to the Special Victims Division.

Projected Completion Date: Q2 2022

Recommendation

The NYPD should develop and deliver specialized training for SVD supervisors regarding investigative practices, major case management and oversight, and supervision of detectives.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will enhance and improve existing trainings on appropriate management and investigative practices for all supervisors assigned to the Special Victims Division.

Projected Completion Date: Q3 2022

Recommendation

Incorporate opportunities for cross-training with partner disciplines (e.g., advocacy, SAFE, Prosecution) to improve communication and provide enhanced understanding of roles and response practices.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD will increase cross-training opportunities with outside organizations. The Special Victims Division currently provides several trainings for peer volunteer advocates across the City, including but not limited to the Crime Victims Treatment Center (CVTC), the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention program (SAVI), Bellevue Hospital Volunteer Advocacy Group, Domestic & Other Violence Emergencies (DOVE), and the New York Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Hospital Volunteer Program.

Investigative Response

Responding to cases with processes based on best practices is vital to the success of SVD and case closures. The NYPD strives to improve the entire investigative response, from interviewing suspects and crime scene response, to ongoing casework.

Recommendation

Ensure consistent supervisory oversight of case assignment, investigative actions, and case statuses to ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities and support feedback opportunities related to caseloads and quality of work. To continue to ensure manageable caseload levels, the NYPD would benefit from a yearly agency-wide review of detective workload including assigned caseloads across all investigative units.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD regularly assesses assigned resources and workloads in all areas of the Department. Recently, the Department has undertaken a Bureau-by-Bureau staffing assessment that will look at resource levels, roles and responsibilities, workloads and opportunities for efficiencies. After the initial

Department review is complete, a reassessment will be completed at a regular cadence.

Projected Completion Date: Q3 2022

Recommendation

Review, evaluate and provide written direction regarding key investigative steps, including detectives photographing victims at the time of their report, utilization of crime scene response, utilization of controlled calls, suspect interviews, and recording of victim interviews.

NYPD Commitment

The NYPD is committed to better aligning investigative response with best practices, particularly with regard to crime scene response, interviewing suspects, progression of investigative steps, and closing cases.

The Department will review and enhance policies to guide investigators in how to manage crime scenes, how to properly utilize controlled calls, how to conduct suspect interviews, and when to record survivor interviews.

The NYPD has already changed policy on photographing survivors.

Projected Completion Date: Q1 2023

Recommendation

Establish a mechanism by which patrol are given the ability to enter case documentation electronically via field-based record management system (RMS) reporting, such that they can enter preliminary report themselves.

NYPD Commitment

The Department has been increasing the opportunities for forms to be completed electronically and will explore opportunities to further expand this work.

Projected Completion Date: Q3 2022

Partnerships

The NYPD's guiding philosophy is centered on the idea that strong relationships with communities are crucial to effective law enforcement. With that in mind, the Department aims to continue to foster strong relationships between the Department, communities, survivors, and other partners in law enforcement.

Streamlining and solidifying means by which the NYPD engages with external parties will help improve how sensitive cases are handled.

Recommendation

Formalize and standardize interactions with borough District Attorney offices regarding:

- When, where, and what investigations are presented for review
- Pre-charging interviews with victims
- How DA driven victim interviews are completed
- Determinations of probable cause

NYPD Commitment

Processes and procedures are a shared responsibility between the NYPD and the District Attorneys (DA). The NYPD will convene a series of meetings with all five New York City District Attorneys to discuss the standardization of processes regarding when and how cases are presented to the DAs.

Projected Completion Date: Q3 2022

Recommendation

Develop a standing working group with advocacy partners that includes SVD supervisors and detectives. Use this group to improve communication, define roles, expectations and practices.

NYPD Commitment

The Department will regularly meet with advocacy partners to improve practices and further develop bonds with the advocacy community.

Projected Completion Date: Q2 2022

Recommendation

Discuss integration of sexual assault advocates within SVDs in all boroughs.

NYPD Commitment

Advocates will be more deeply embedded into NYPD boroughs once new facilities improvements are complete. The NYPD is dedicated to making sure survivor services are effective and available where people need them most.

Projected Completion Date: Q1 2023

Recommendation

Discuss increasing advocacy-law enforcement communications via a designated liaison (akin to the OCME liaison position) and the development of agency-based survivor services unit in the NYPD.

NYPD Commitment

The Department will explore the creation of new capabilities to improve survivor advocacy.

Projected Completion Date: Q4 2022



NYPD