

New DNA evidence kit for victims of rape helps preserve evidence in low-resource settings

British researcher will present innovation at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace / First trial planned to start this autumn in Kenya

Gender-based violence is part of everyday life for many women and one of the biggest humanitarian issues world-wide. However, far too many incidents have no consequences and gathering evidence in cases of sexual violence is often difficult. In order to identify and prosecute perpetrators it is crucial to collect forensic evidence such as DNA. For many women who cannot access a medical examination after a rape there is now hope:

Professor Lisa Smith of the School of Criminology at the University of Leicester (UK) has led a team of researchers to develop a new DNA evidence kit which allows women to self-examine under the supervision of frontline investigators or NGO staff. One component of the kit is an applicator containing a swab which allows victims to recover and preserve DNA from up to 34 hours after a rape. Professor Smith will present this device to the public during the the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Lindau, which is taking place from 20 to 23 August 2019.

The evidence kit can be particularly helpful to women without access to health care, such as women in refugee camps, slums or rural areas. Until recently DNA evidence kits were only available through health care providers and required a (vaginal) examination carried out by a medical professional.

As of autumn 2019 the new self-examination kit is being field tested in Kenya. The Wangu Kanja Foundation in Nairobi is a key partner in this project. Wangu Kanja was sexually assaulted herself in 2002. Today she is working with survivors of sexual assault and is an activist for social change. The project is being supported by Dr. Francis Kuria Kegema, Secretary General of the African Council of Religious Leaders of Religions for Peace.

The Chairman of the Foundation Peace Dialogue of the World Religions and Civil Society, Professor Dr. h.c. Wolfgang Schürer, has been promoting the project.

“There finally has to be uncomplicated, concrete help for women after a rape. Most importantly, we hope that the evidence this device supplies, prevents rape in the first place. The development of a self-testing DNA swab kit is a groundbreaking contribution to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.” The UN Convention explicitly defines violence against women as an offence against human rights, and women’s rights as human rights.

Further information:

<https://wangukanjafoundation.org/gender-based-violence-links/>
www.le.ac.uk/forensics-global-justice