



Thread



Anne Easton @anne_k_easton · Aug 9, 2018



1/21: For my @Harvard masters thesis, I chose to study the topic of the rape kit backlog. Here is a thread about what I've learned about this issue. Hint: I learned a lot (& so can you with this thread)!

[#ENDTHEBACKLOG](#)



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2. I met with Ilse Knecht (@maximizeDNA) at The Joyful Heart Foundation (@TheJHF), the advocacy organization behind @EndTheBacklog. They're doing major work to pass legislation in all 50 states & they have an Accountability Project.



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3. @TheJHF Accountability Project is important because there's still no accurate count of the actual number of untested rape kits in the US. Some jurisdictions have not provided a number. Some have just ignored requests, refusing to give a count.



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4. Although this topic is getting a lot of notice now (in part thanks to the #MeToo 🙋 movement), it's not a new issue. The Debbie Smith Act, passed in 2001, & the SAFER Act of 2013 were both supposed to help clear the backlog, but now it's 2018 & this is still a massive problem.



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5. On the positive side, some cities, like Los Angeles, have worked hard to clear their backlogs. LA even built a new crime lab to make it happen. And, many states have passed legislation or have legislation in the works to address the rape kit backlog.



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6. Utah began an initiative called "Start By Believing" (@SBB_Utah) that is now active in several states. They've also instituted an online tracking system so survivors can know where their kit is at all times.



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7. One thing many people don't know about the Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) process is that after a rape kit is collected in a hospital or a justice center, it goes to police before it goes to the lab. Why?



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8. Some officials say a rape kit has to go to the police to maintain the chain of custody. Others say kits should skip this step and go directly to the lab.



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9. Part of the reason the backlog formed in the first place was because police departments decided which were 'real' rapes and only sent the kits they deemed important to the lab.



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10. Why isn't there more of an effort to remove rape kit judgement from the police? Maybe this is something lawmakers should be working towards. Especially considering what happened in Fayetteville, NC.



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11. In Fayetteville, police simply destroyed 333 kits – just to make room in their storage facility. (In an unprecedented move, they did apologize to survivors, but the damage was already done.)



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12. Sexual assault advocates say that this lack of respect for victims, especially after they've undergone an hours-long invasive examination in the hope of prosecuting their attacker, is a symbol of how terribly survivors are treated.





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13. As of January '18, testing backlogged kits has uncovered nearly 1313 suspected serial rapists -- in just three cities. These suspects have committed crimes, some violent, in 40 states. This shows the power of using collected DNA to identify career criminals.



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14. A class action suit against the Houston Police Department for failure to address its rape kit backlog was dismissed on a technicality. At one time, Houston had 6663 untested kits.



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15. Another suit has been filed by a woman against the Houston Police Department. She says that the HPD had multiple untested rape kits from the suspect who assaulted her and that if those kits had been tested, her assault would never have occurred.



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16. While the goal is to test all kits, old and new, cities have found that particularly the testing of older kits has put a strain on crime labs where there is a shortage of funding and manpower.



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17. This is true in police depts as well. Testing more & more kits means lots of results coming in. So, a new type of backlog is forming: not enough staff to investigate all of these cases. The results sometimes sit in drawers until 'someone can get to them.'



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18. Part of the 2016 Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (@SAKInitiative) calls for jurisdictions to hire investigators specifically to take on old rape cases that have now been tested and have DNA results.



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19. SAKI, a massive interdisciplinary study conducted by the National Institute of Justice which involved forensic nurses, law enforcement officials, district attorneys & advocates, resulted in a 123-page booklet outlining best practices.



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20. Clearing the rape kit backlog appears to be something that people really want and many people, & cities, are really trying to make it happen, but it's just not going to happen quickly or easily.



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Replying to @anne_k_easton

21. @NatashaSimone, survivor & founder of @NatashasJustice says, "In all of this talk about the backlog, the absolute most important thing is that society needs to believe and respect survivors. Then the journey to healing will truly begin."

