

Sexual Harms Sector Statement of Concern **Self-Swab 'Rape Kits'**

The following signatories from the sexual violence sector wish to jointly and publicly share our concerns about the sale, promotion and use of self-swab 'rape kits' by victims/survivors.

As providers of support to victims/survivors, we understand the trauma of rape and sexual assault, and the further distress victims can feel about disclosing and reporting their experiences. Our sector exists to provide the specialist support and expert understanding of rape and sexual assault that survivors need. Prioritising the overall physical and psychological wellbeing of all victims and survivors is vital; this is why we are sharing our concerns publicly about the use of self-swab 'rape kits' and the misperception the awareness of them can bring about.

We believe that transparency and clarity is crucial when it comes to supporting victims/survivors; this is why we believe that anyone receiving a self swab 'rape kit' should proactively be told that DNA is not the only relevant or important evidence gathered if they choose to pursue criminal proceedings.

It's also important that all those who experience sexual assault understand that their local SARC (sexual assault referral centre) is FREE to use, and that specially trained crisis workers and medical examiners can ensure that not only is any evidence collected correctly, but that the associated health checks and contraceptive care can be obtained.

Going to a SARC does not mean that an individual has to report to the police; all SARCs store any swabs and evidence for up to 7 years without police involvement. This means a victim can revisit their decision to report to the police at any point. Having DNA evidence collected by a qualified and trained examiner reduces the possibility of evidence being contaminated, being inadmissible in any investigation process and will secure the quality of it until the victim decides what they wish to do.

Our collective specialist support services also provide individuals with counselling; ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) services to support anyone through the system; group and peer support; and support for the friends and families of victims/survivors. But whatever the victim/survivor decides to do, the crucial thing is that they're provided with the best support that will help their healing, and that they understand their options fully so that they can give informed consent.

Therefore, we collectively cannot support the use of self-swab 'rape kits' and actively encourage any victim to use the free services provided by SARCs or specialist sexual violence services that voluntary services provide.

Further Support

- Should you require further support, you can contact the National 24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line on **0808 500 2222**
- To find your local SARC, go to: www.nhs.uk/service-search/sexual-health-services/find-a-rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centre
- To find your local specialist survivor support, go to www.thesurvivorstrust.org.uk
- To find a Rape Crisis Centre, go to www.rapecrisis.org.uk/find-a-centre
- If you want to talk to someone about feeling unsafe in a relationship, call the 24/7 Domestic Abuse Support Line on **0808 2000 247**

Signed by

