



Scientists can use body fluids, hair and skin left behind on victims' clothing or bodies to test for DNA evidence that convicts rapists. Photos: courtesy of The DNA Project

DNA evidence convicts rapists

Vanessa Lynch and Carolyn Hancock

International studies indicate that there is no better way of getting rapists off the street to protect women and young girls than DNA and the use of a DNA criminal intelligence database.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is a carrier of genetic information and each individual's DNA is unique. Although South Africa awaits the promulgation of crucial DNA legislation that will give police the ability to immediately take sexual offenders off the streets, the worst sexual violence statistics in the world continue to accumulate.

But these are not statistics – they are terrified women and children who faced horrific acts of violence, many of them too young or uneducated to take appropriate action to ensure the rapists are held accountable. According to the United Nations, South Africa ranks first in the world (per capita) for sexual assault and rape. Reported rape cases in South Africa are about 200 every day. Many incidents of rape are not reported, but statistics suggest that in South Africa a woman or child is raped every 18 seconds.

Equally frightening, 90% of rapists re-offend and may assault more than 30 women and children before finally being held accountable for their actions.

The DNA Project lobbies for the passing of a DNA Bill that will make

it mandatory for all arrestees and convicted offenders to have their DNA profiles entered onto a database. This database will be compared with DNA profiles collected from crime scenes and victims of sexual assault.

The organisation also increases public awareness of the benefits of DNA evidence in the identification and conviction of criminals. The DNA Project (funded by the Change a Life Trust), Assegai and Javelin, and Africa Imagery have developed the "She Asked For It" advert.

The advert has a simple message: She did not ask to be raped, but she did ask for DNA to be collected because she was empowered with the knowledge that DNA evidence convicts.

Blood, saliva, semen, tissue under the victim's fingernails or hair that can be found on the victim's body all carry the unique DNA of the rapist. Non-consensual sexual or other contact with the victim (for instance, ejaculating on the victim, biting, licking or kissing) could leave behind DNA. If evidence of someone else's DNA is found on or in the victim's body, it proves they have had contact with the victim. Reporting cases of sexual assault and preserving DNA evidence could help put the rapist behind bars and prevent further attacks.

Vanessa Lynch is the executive director and founder of the DNA Project. Carolyn Hancock is a director of the DNA Project. www.dnaproject.co.za

What rape survivors should do

It is important to get to a health care facility as quickly as possible to obtain medical care, treatment and advice, and to collect evidence to support legal cases.

To assist in the collection of DNA evidence, victims of sexual assault should:

- Not change their clothing;
- Not shower or wash any part of their body;
- Report the incident to the police; and
- Go to a medical doctor or forensic nurse within 48 hours for DNA evidence to be collected.

TYPES OF EVIDENCE WHICH MAY CONTAIN DNA



BLOOD



SKIN



SALIVA



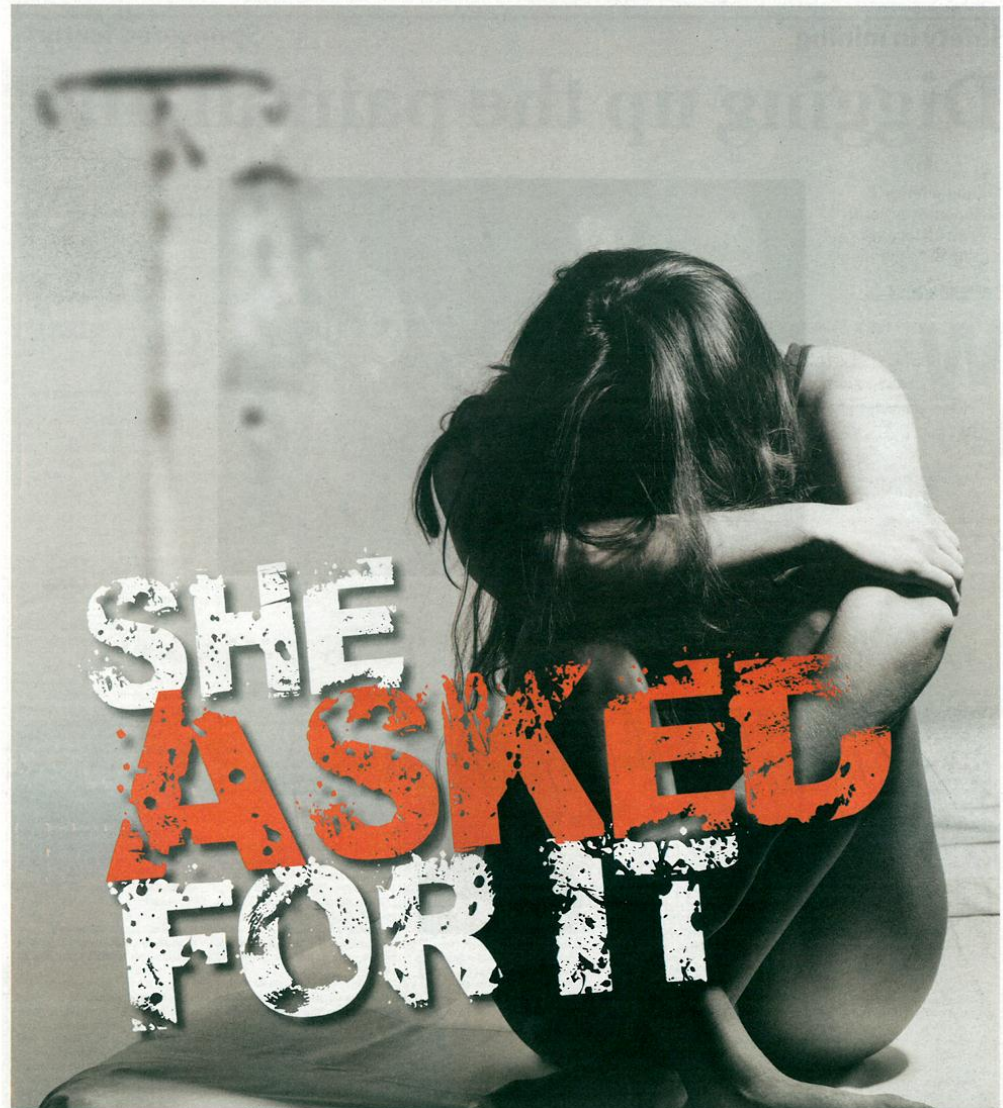
TISSUE UNDER NAILS



HAIR



SEMEN



SHE ASKED FOR IT

SHE ASKED FOR DNA EVIDENCE TO BE COLLECTED DNA EVIDENCE CONVICTS

DNA evidence can be obtained from a person's body or clothing. DNA is found in body fluids, such as semen or saliva, as well as blood, skin cells and hair.

Report sexual assault within 48 hours to your local police station and ask for DNA evidence to be collected by a medical practitioner or forensic nurse.

DNAPROJECT
FIGHTING CRIME WITH SCIENCE

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Change a life