

## **A Comparative Analysis of a Specialist Rape Investigation Unit**

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Most police forces in England and Wales make use of specialist rape or sexual assault investigation units. Yet, there is little robust research concerning the impact of such units or their efficacy compared to a non-specialist policing response. This paper is based on the results of an analysis of 441 police case files involving a specialist rape investigation unit (Operation Bluestone) and a comparator non-specialist policing area. The case file data comprises all rape investigations conducted over a two year period. The research sought to examine the progression of recorded cases through the criminal justice process, case characteristics, victim care and support, vulnerability and crime recording. Analysis of the case file data found that the Bluestone unit outperformed the comparator across a range of performance measures. This was despite the fact that Bluestone investigations featured a larger number of highly complex cases and victims with multiples vulnerabilities. Finally, the paper considers the implications of these findings for the future of specialist rape and sexual assault investigation units.

Key words: Rape, police, sexual assault, victim care, vulnerability, crime recording