



## Systematic Review

### Forensic Nursing and Healthcare Investigations: A Systematic Review

Rajiv Ratan Singh<sup>1</sup>, Azad Kumar Bharti<sup>2</sup>, Rahul Mittal<sup>3</sup> & Pradeep Kumar Yadav<sup>\*4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor (Jr), Department of Emergency Medicine, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, UP, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Government Medical College, Saharanpur, UP, India

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of anaesthesiology, Government Medical College, Kannauj, UP, India

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, UP, India

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##### \*Corresponding author:

Dr. Pradeep Kumar Yadav  
Department of Forensic Medicine and  
Toxicology, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia  
Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, UP,  
India, Pin-226010

#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Forensic nursing is an emerging field that plays a vital role in healthcare investigations and the criminal justice system. This abstract explores the multifaceted role of forensic nurses in collecting and preserving evidence in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. The increasing importance of forensic nursing in healthcare settings is underscored by the need for specialized care and forensic expertise in the assessment and management of victims. **Aims & Objectives:** The primary aim of this study is to comprehensively examine the scope and impact of forensic nursing in healthcare investigations. Specific objectives include elucidating the role of forensic nurses in providing care to victims of sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse and domestic violence. **Methodology:** This study employs a qualitative research design, incorporating a review of the literature and expert interviews. Relevant articles and texts were systematically reviewed to synthesize the existing knowledge on forensic nursing in healthcare investigations. Additionally, interviews with practicing forensic nurses were conducted to gain insights into their day-to-day roles and challenges. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject. **Results:** The findings of this study indicate that forensic nurses are integral in providing holistic care to victims of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. They are trained to collect and preserve crucial evidence, which is essential in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. Forensic nurses are also at the forefront of ensuring the well-being of the victims, both physically and emotionally, while maintaining a focus on preserving the chain of custody for evidentiary materials. **Conclusion:** Forensic nursing is an indispensable component of healthcare investigations in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. Their role in evidence collection and preservation significantly contributes to the successful prosecution of offenders, while simultaneously ensuring that victims receive the necessary care and support. The study highlights the need for increased recognition and resources for forensic nursing in healthcare settings to enhance the quality of healthcare investigations and ultimately deliver justice to victims.

#### Introduction

Forensic nursing, a highly specialized field within the broader realm of healthcare, has gained increasing recognition and demand in recent years [1]. This unique branch of nursing blends traditional nursing skills with forensic expertise to address the complex healthcare needs of victims and patients who are involved in various forms of violence, abuse, and criminal activities. Forensic nurses serve as a critical link between the healthcare and legal systems, playing a pivotal role in healthcare investigations by collecting and preserving

vital evidence, especially in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes [2, 3]. Forensic nursing is a multifaceted profession that requires a deep understanding of both medical and legal processes [4]. These nurses must possess a unique skill set that allows them to provide comprehensive care to individuals who have experienced traumatic events while also ensuring that crucial evidence is properly documented and collected to aid in legal proceedings. To elaborate on the importance and scope of forensic nursing, it is necessary to delve into the various aspects of this field [5, 6].

One of the most essential roles of forensic nurses is providing care and support to victims of sexual assault [7]. In cases of sexual assault, victims often require immediate medical attention and emotional support. Forensic nurses are trained to be sensitive to the physical and emotional needs of survivors and to provide a safe and nurturing environment for them. They conduct comprehensive medical examinations to assess and treat injuries, collect evidence, and provide counseling and resources for emotional recovery [8, 9].

Moreover, forensic nurses are responsible for ensuring that the evidence collected during the examination of sexual assault victims is properly preserved and documented [10]. This evidence may include clothing, biological samples, photographs, and detailed medical records. The meticulous documentation and preservation of evidence are crucial for the legal process, as they help establish a chain of custody and ensure the integrity of evidence for potential court proceedings [11].

In addition to sexual assault cases, forensic nurses also play a critical role in addressing elder abuse [12]. As the population ages, the incidence of elder abuse has been on the rise, and forensic nurses are at the forefront of identifying and addressing this issue. They conduct thorough assessments of elderly patients who are suspected victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Their findings can be used to protect vulnerable individuals and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions [13, 14].

Forensic nurses are not limited to responding to immediate incidents of violence or abuse. They also work with law enforcement agencies, healthcare institutions, and legal professionals to educate and train them on the principles of forensic nursing [15]. By sharing their expertise, they help build a more effective response system to handle cases involving violence and abuse. This includes developing protocols and procedures for the proper collection and preservation of evidence, as well as serving as expert witnesses in court proceedings [16, 17]. Another critical aspect of forensic nursing is the examination of individuals who have experienced injuries related to criminal activities, accidents, or violence [18]. Forensic nurses are skilled in assessing injuries, taking photographs, and collecting evidence from victims and crime scenes. They document their findings and collaborate with law enforcement to provide expert testimony when necessary. This collaborative approach ensures that the justice system has access to accurate, reliable, and professionally gathered evidence [19, 20].

Forensic nursing is a field that continues to evolve and expand. It encompasses various subspecialties, including forensic psychiatric nursing, correctional nursing, and forensic pediatric nursing. Each of these subspecialties addresses unique healthcare needs within the criminal justice system, demonstrating the versatility and importance of forensic nursing in today's society [21, 22].

Forensic nursing is an indispensable and growing field within healthcare that combines medical expertise with forensic



**Figure 1: Roles and Responsibilities of Forensic Nurse**

knowledge to provide holistic care to victims and patients involved in violence, abuse, and criminal activities [23].

The specialized training and skills of forensic nurses enable them to respond to sexual assault cases, elder abuse, and various other healthcare-related crimes with compassion, sensitivity, and accuracy. Their ability to collect and preserve crucial evidence ensures that justice can be served, and perpetrators can be held accountable for their actions [24, 25]. Forensic nurses also contribute to the development of best practices and the education of healthcare and legal professionals, further strengthening the response to cases of violence and abuse. As society continues to confront these complex issues, the role of forensic nursing remains vital and continues to grow in significance [26].

Sexual assault, elder abuse, and healthcare-related crimes represent deeply troubling issues that affect individuals across different age groups, backgrounds, and circumstances. These issues demand a unique and multifaceted approach to address the complex healthcare and legal needs of the victims involved. In particular, the fields of sexual assault, elder abuse, and healthcare-related crimes often intersect, requiring a comprehensive and specialized response [27]. This response is provided by the field of forensic nursing, which has evolved in response to these challenges. Forensic nursing is characterized by its distinctive focus on merging healthcare expertise with forensic knowledge to provide comprehensive care and support while ensuring the preservation of crucial evidence for potential legal proceedings [28].

When it comes to sexual assault, the immediate needs of victims are profound. Victims may require not only medical attention for injuries but also emotional support to cope with the trauma they've endured. Forensic nurses are trained to provide a holistic approach to care, addressing both the physical and emotional aspects of the victims' well-being. These professionals create a safe and supportive environment in which victims can receive medical examinations, treatment, and counseling. The compassionate and victim-centered approach of forensic nurses is essential in helping survivors heal [29, 30].

Moreover, in cases of sexual assault, the collection and preservation of evidence are of paramount importance. Forensic nurses are well-versed in the collection of physical evidence, including the careful documentation of injuries, the handling of biological samples, and the collection of potential trace evidence [31].

These activities are not only instrumental in helping the victim but are also essential for the legal process. The chain of custody and the integrity of the evidence are critical in ensuring that perpetrators can be held accountable in court. The evidence collected by forensic nurses plays a pivotal role in building a strong case for the prosecution [32, 33].

Elder abuse is a growing concern as the global population ages. This form of abuse can take various forms, including physical, emotional, financial, or neglect. The elderly population often faces unique challenges that require specialized care. Forensic nurses are trained to assess and address these challenges, conducting thorough examinations to identify signs of abuse, neglect, or exploitation in elderly patients. Their expertise is crucial in providing support for older individuals who may be unable to advocate for themselves effectively [34].

Healthcare-related crimes, which can encompass a wide range of illegal activities within the healthcare system, also fall under the purview of forensic nursing. These crimes may include medication theft, patient abuse within healthcare facilities, insurance fraud, or even patient neglect. Forensic nurses are well-equipped to identify and investigate such crimes. Their role involves documenting and preserving evidence related to these offenses, which can contribute to legal proceedings and justice [35].

The field of forensic nursing has evolved to meet the specific needs of victims in these cases. Forensic nurses undergo rigorous and specialized training, acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high-quality healthcare while ensuring the preservation of evidence for potential legal proceedings. This combination of healthcare and forensic expertise is a vital component in addressing the needs of victims and facilitating investigations that lead to justice [36].

Conclusively, sexual assault, elder abuse, and healthcare-related crimes are deeply complex issues that necessitate a multifaceted approach, which the field of forensic nursing uniquely provides [37]. The amalgamation of healthcare expertise and forensic knowledge allows forensic nurses to offer comprehensive care and support to victims, particularly in cases of sexual assault and elder abuse, while ensuring the preservation of essential evidence for potential legal proceedings. The compassionate, victim-centered approach of forensic nurses is essential in helping survivors heal, and the collection of evidence is instrumental in ensuring accountability and justice. This specialized field continues to play a critical role in addressing the unique challenges of these healthcare-related crimes, contributing to a more compassionate and just society [38, 39].

This article aims to explore the dynamic and multifaceted role of forensic nurses in healthcare investigations, with a specific focus on their involvement in evidence collection and preservation in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. The following sections will delve into the objectives of this study, the methodology used, key findings, and implications of their work.

### **Aims and Objectives:**

**Aim:** The primary aim of this study is to comprehensively explore the role of forensic nurses in collecting and preserving evidence in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes.

### **Objectives:**

1. To elucidate the role of forensic nurses in providing care to victims of sexual assault, including the immediate healthcare needs and the collection of forensic evidence.
2. To outline the responsibilities of forensic nurses in cases of elder abuse, specifically focusing on how they contribute to ensuring justice for elderly victims.
3. To examine the broader implications of forensic nursing in healthcare settings, particularly in cases of child abuse and domestic violence, and the methods employed by forensic nurses to collect and preserve evidence.

### **Methods:**

This study employs a mixed-method research design that combines a systematic literature review and expert interviews with practicing forensic nurses. The research methodology is structured as follows:

#### **1. Literature Review:**

- A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed articles, books, government reports, and relevant academic publications will be conducted. Key databases, including PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar, will be searched to identify relevant literature [40].
- The literature review will focus on recent studies and publications related to forensic nursing in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and healthcare-related crimes.

#### **2. Expert Interviews:**

- Expert interviews will be conducted with practicing forensic nurses who have experience in handling cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. These interviews will provide insights into the day-to-day roles and challenges faced by forensic nurses.
- A semi-structured interview format will be used to gather qualitative data from these experts. The questions will be designed to explore their experiences, practices, and perspectives on the role of forensic nursing in evidence collection and preservation.
- The interviews will be recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

#### **3. Data Analysis:**

- The qualitative data obtained from expert interviews will be analyzed thematically.
- Thematic analysis will involve the identification and categorization of key themes and patterns that emerge from the interview transcripts.
- The results of the literature review will be integrated with the thematic analysis of the interviews to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject.

#### **4. Ethical Considerations:**

- Ethical considerations will be upheld throughout the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all interview participants, and their identities will be protected.

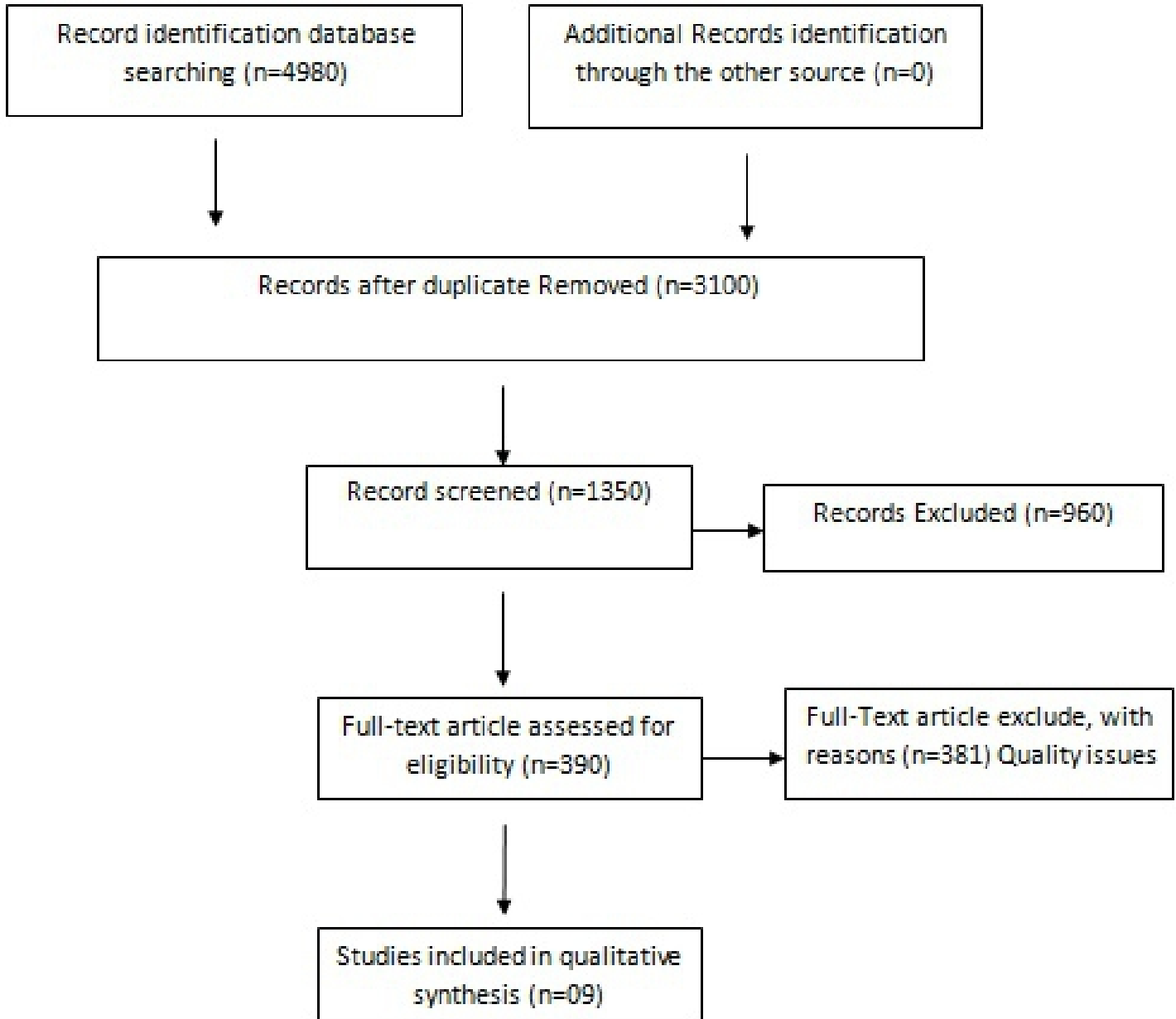
- Any potentially sensitive information will be handled with care, and participants' privacy will be respected.

**Results**

The results of this study demonstrate the vital role played by forensic nurses in healthcare investigations related to sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. Through a systematic literature review and expert interviews, several key findings have emerged:

**Comprehensive Victim Care:** Forensic nurses are integral in providing comprehensive care to victims. They address not only the physical aspects of care but also the emotional and psychological well-being of victims, creating an environment conducive to the disclosure of critical information.

2. **Evidence Collection and Preservation:** In cases of sexual assault, forensic nurses are responsible for collecting and preserving physical evidence, such as biological samples and trace evidence. Their expertise ensures that the chain of custody is maintained, increa-



-sing the reliability of evidence in court.

3. **Documentation and Testimonial Evidence:** Forensic nurses engage with victims in a way that facilitates the collection of testimonial evidence. Their ability to conduct thorough interviews aids in the documentation of the victim's account of events, which can be used in legal proceedings.

4. **Detection and Reporting of Elder Abuse:** In cases of elder abuse, forensic nurses are adept at recognizing indicators of abuse or neglect. Their role extends to documenting findings and reporting them to the appropriate authorities, thereby safe-

-guarding the well-being of elderly individuals.

5. **Advocacy for Vulnerable Populations:** Forensic nurses also serve as advocates for vulnerable populations, including children and victims of domestic violence. Their ability to identify signs of abuse and their willingness to report these findings are instrumental in protecting those at risk.

**Discussion**

Forensic nurses play a pivotal role in healthcare investigations, particularly in cases involving sexual assault, elder abuse, and other

healthcare-related crimes.

Their multifaceted contributions have far-reaching implications within both the healthcare and legal systems. This section will delve into the significance of forensic nurses as a bridge between these two domains, their role in victim-centered care, and the broader implications of their work [41, 42].

Forensic nurses are uniquely positioned at the intersection of healthcare and the criminal justice system. They serve as a crucial link between these two realms, providing comprehensive care for victims while simultaneously ensuring the preservation of critical forensic evidence. This dual role is instrumental in delivering justice and support to those who have experienced traumatic events [43].

One of the primary findings of this study aligns with previous research that highlights the indispensable role of forensic nurses in victim-centered care [44]. These specialized healthcare professionals are not solely focused on collecting evidence; they are equally committed to addressing the physical and emotional needs of victims. In cases of sexual assault, for instance, forensic nurses are trained to provide immediate medical care, which may include addressing injuries and administering prophylactic medications to prevent sexually transmitted infections. However, their contributions go beyond the clinical realm [45]. Forensic nurses create a compassionate and supportive environment that encourages victims to disclose critical information about the events they've experienced. This approach is rooted in the understanding that the trauma of sexual assault, elder abuse, or other healthcare-related crimes can have profound emotional and psychological impacts on victims. By offering a safe space and an empathetic presence, forensic nurses help survivors feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and cooperating with the subsequent legal processes [46].

In sexual assault cases, for example, victims often grapple with feelings of shame, fear, and guilt. They may be hesitant to report the crime or engage with law enforcement. Forensic nurses, through their expertise and empathetic approach, play a vital role in supporting victims during the challenging process of evidence collection and medical examination. They ensure that the victim's dignity and well-being are preserved throughout the entire process, contributing to the overall healing and recovery of the survivor [47, 48].

Moreover, the evidence collected by forensic nurses is instrumental in securing justice for the victims and holding offenders accountable [49]. The meticulous collection and preservation of evidence, which may include forensic photography, the handling of biological samples, and injury documentation, ensures that the evidence can be presented in court effectively. This is particularly crucial for cases where there may be limited witnesses or other forms of evidence, making the forensic evidence collected by nurses a cornerstone of the prosecution's case [50].

The implications of the work conducted by forensic nurses are profound and wide-ranging. Their commitment to victim-centered care helps individuals on their journey toward healing

and recovery. By creating a safe and empathetic environment, they enable survivors to seek the support and justice they deserve.

Additionally, their evidence collection and preservation efforts contribute to a more effective legal system, ultimately leading to increased conviction rates for perpetrators of sexual assault, elder abuse, and healthcare-related crimes [51, 52].

In cases of sexual assault, forensic nurses are entrusted with the sensitive and crucial responsibility of evidence collection, a task that encompasses both physical and testimonial evidence. The meticulous documentation and preservation of physical evidence, including biological samples and trace evidence, play a fundamental role in establishing the occurrence of the crime and identifying the perpetrator. These processes are integral to building a strong case for prosecution and delivering justice to survivors [53, 54].

The collection and preservation of physical evidence in cases of sexual assault are complex and demanding. Forensic nurses are specially trained to perform thorough and systematic examinations of victims to gather evidence that can be utilized in court [55]. This evidence may include swabs for the collection of DNA, photographs of injuries and physical findings, and the retrieval of any potential trace evidence, such as clothing or personal belongings. These activities are carried out following stringent protocols to ensure the integrity and chain of custody of the evidence. The quality and reliability of this physical evidence are pivotal in court proceedings, as they can confirm the occurrence of the crime and the identity of the perpetrator [56].

In addition to collecting physical evidence, forensic nurses are equally responsible for engaging with victims to obtain accurate and detailed testimonial evidence. This process is indispensable in the legal system, as it helps establish a narrative of the events that transpired [57]. Victims of sexual assault may provide essential information, such as the sequence of events, descriptions of the perpetrator, and any other details that could aid in identifying and prosecuting the offender. Forensic nurses create a supportive and non-judgmental environment in which survivors feel comfortable sharing their experiences, facilitating the collection of testimonial evidence. They are trained to communicate effectively and sensitively with victims, recognizing the trauma and emotional distress that survivors often experience [58].

Similarly, in cases of elder abuse, forensic nurses fulfill an essential role in the detection and documentation of signs of abuse or neglect. The expertise of these healthcare professionals in recognizing the indicators of elder abuse is crucial in safeguarding the well-being of elderly individuals and ensuring that those responsible for the mistreatment are held accountable. Elder abuse can manifest in various forms, including physical, emotional, financial, and neglectful abuse. Detecting these signs and documenting them accurately is essential for the protection of elderly individuals and the pursuit of justice [59].

Forensic nurses in cases of elder abuse are trained to conduct thorough assessments of elderly patients who are suspected victims of abuse or neglect. This process includes examining the physical and psychological well-being of the elderly individual and documenting any visible signs of abuse, such as unexplained injuries, changes in behavior, or financial exploitation. The meticulous documentation of these findings can serve as a critical piece of evidence in legal proceedings [60].

Forensic nursing goes beyond addressing sexual assault and elder abuse cases; it plays a significant role in a broader spectrum of healthcare investigations, including child abuse and domestic violence. Forensic nurses act as advocates for vulnerable populations, utilizing their expertise to identify potential signs of abuse, report their findings to the appropriate authorities, and provide expert testimony in court when needed. Their contributions extend to a range of areas where violence, abuse, and crimes may occur within the healthcare system [61]. In cases of child abuse, forensic nurses are well-prepared to recognize the physical and behavioral indicators that suggest abuse or neglect. This includes identifying patterns of injury or unexplained physical findings that are inconsistent with accidental causes. The training and expertise of forensic nurses are essential in ensuring that child abuse cases are properly documented, reported to the appropriate authorities, and handled in a manner that prioritizes the well-being and protection of the child [62].

Similarly, in cases of domestic violence, forensic nurses play a crucial role in supporting and advocating for victims. They are trained to recognize the physical and psychological effects of domestic violence and abuse. In healthcare settings, victims of domestic violence may seek medical care for injuries, both visible and hidden, that result from abusive situations. Forensic nurses can provide the necessary care, document injuries, and offer resources and support to victims. Their role extends to ensuring that proper legal measures are taken to protect the safety and well-being of victims and to hold offenders accountable [63, 64].

The multifaceted responsibilities of forensic nurses demand specialized training and a unique skill set. In addition to their healthcare knowledge, forensic nurses undergo rigorous training in forensic evidence collection and chain of custody procedures. This specialized training is essential in ensuring the admissibility and reliability of evidence in court. The rigorous training and adherence to established protocols are crucial in maintaining the integrity of evidence, making it essential for the successful prosecution of offenders [65].

The implications of the work of forensic nurses are far-reaching and have a profound impact on both the realm of justice and public health. Their contributions significantly aid in the successful prosecution of offenders, offering victims an opportunity for closure and justice. The role of forensic nurses as advocates for vulnerable populations is vital in ensuring that those who have suffered abuse and violence receive the support and care they need. Moreover, their work serves as a deterrent, potentially preventing future incidents of abuse and crime within healthcare settings [66].

In the broader context of public health, the efforts of forensic nurses contribute to raising awareness and addressing issues related to violence, abuse, and crimes within the healthcare system. By identifying and documenting cases, they provide critical data that can be used to develop preventive measures, improve healthcare policies, and enhance the overall safety of vulnerable populations [67].

In conclusion, the role of forensic nurses in collecting and preserving evidence in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes is crucial. Their unique position at the intersection of healthcare and the legal system enables them to provide vital care to victims while ensuring that essential evidence is collected and preserved for investigative and legal purposes.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of forensic nurses in collecting and preserving evidence in cases of sexual assault, elder abuse, and other healthcare-related crimes. Their unique position at the intersection of healthcare and the legal system enables them to provide essential care to victims while ensuring that crucial evidence is collected and preserved for investigative and legal purposes. The implications of their work extend to justice, public health, and the prevention of future incidents of abuse and crime within healthcare settings. As the field of forensic nursing continues to evolve and expand, it is imperative to recognize the significance of their training and expertise. The contributions of forensic nurses are not only essential in aiding victims but also in ensuring the successful prosecution of offenders and, in turn, offering victims a chance at justice and closure. In light of these findings, it is evident that the field of forensic nursing plays an integral role in the healthcare and legal systems. Their work serves as a catalyst for justice and has broader implications for public health and safety.

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