

Justice requires that forensic sciences be standardized to protect the innocent

Santae Tribble is one of more than 350 people who have been exonerated by DNA testing after going to prison. Horrifically, 18 of the wrongly accused made it to death row before the truth came to light. The Innocence Project has found, for example, that unverified or improper forensic analysis has contributed to more than 50 percent of its DNA exonerations. The National Research Council, meanwhile, released a blistering 328-page report in 2009 calling out qualitative forensic practices such as those routinely used to compare hair, bite marks, bullet markings, shoe patterns, and tire prints.

But it's not just bad science that's driving the problem. After all, some techniques, such as DNA analysis and blood typing, bear the imprimatur of rigorous, reliable research. The bigger issue is the way people perform the techniques—that is, largely without scientific training, oversight, or standardization.

Take the troubled crime lab of St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2012, it suspended all drug and fingerprint analysis after lawyers revealed that its operators had no standardized procedures, possessed little understanding of basic science, submitted illegible reports, and used dirty equipment. Like many crime labs in the U.S., it hadn't been accredited by an independent forensic-science organization—something that's required in only a few states.

Read the full, original story: It's time to treat crime forensics like real science