

Hotline will be lifeline for sexually abused

By SUSAN TAUBER KLEIN

332-HELP. This is a telephone number every Oakland County man, woman and child should know. It's the 24-hour hotline number for the Oakland Crisis Center for Rape and Sexual Abuse.

Rape is a criminal act that can affect anyone, regardless of age or sex. It's an act that's done against a person's will by someone who's taking advantage of the person's body in a sexual manner.

Regardless of when or where it happens, or who does it, criminal sexual assault is a terrifying experience.

The trained volunteers on the other end of 332-HELP can make the experience easier for the victim to handle. They can even talk to people contemplating raping someone and can answer questions about sexual matters. If they can't, they can refer the caller to someone who can answer them.

The hotline answers can also put callers in touch with other services offered through the center. Volunteers operate advocacy programs and support groups for victims. They also do community education programs.

"We offer the services that the hotline dictates," said Mary Mason, director of the center. "We also look at other centers to see what services they offer."

THE VOLUNTEERS do other things besides answering the hotlines linked into special telephones into their homes. They get directly involved with the victims and victims' families through the advocacy programs.

Anne Kowalsky is in charge of the advocacy program. The Rochester resident said volunteers get involved with meeting with the victim after the sexual assault, going to the hospital with them, staying in the exam room if the doctor allows, speaking to family and friends, filing a police report for rape, doing a follow-up on the victim and even going through the prosecution of the assailant with them.

"Going to court can be a harrowing experience," said Ms. Kowalsky. "We can tell them before hand what rights they have and what to expect."

Rape and sexual abuse took on new meanings on April 1, 1975. This was when the Michigan Criminal Sexual Conduct Code was passed.

"When the MSCA was enacted, a whole new consciousness of rape occurred," said Ms. Mason. The law broadened the criminal sexual acts that are considered sexual offenses. Degrees of rape can now vary depending on the involvement of sexual penetration as opposed to sexual conduct. According to a pamphlet by the center, "the seriousness of the offense is dependent upon the presence or absence of a weapon, the age of the victim and the mental and physical state of the victim."

"THE LAW made it so the victim doesn't have to show resistance," Ms. Mason explained. Former sex experiences of the victim are no longer used in court and now spouses may accuse the other spouse of rape or sexual abuse if they are living apart and

have filed for divorce or separation. No victim of sexual abuse or rape, whether the victim is a man, woman or child, need be alone after the act has been committed.

Ms. Mason recommended that anyone who has been raped or abused call the hotline so a volunteer can be with them immediately to offer emotional support and advice.

There are things a victim must remember before someone comes to help.

If you are raped or sexually abused, call the police and an ambulance to take you to a hospital emergency room. Before they come, do not wash, douche, change clothes, brush your teeth, or do anything that would destroy evidence.

"At the hospital, the doctors will question the victim, look for bruises, bleeding and take smears and cultures that will be sent to the police criminal lab," said Ms. Kowalsky. "These smears contain prosecutable information and must not be destroyed before the doctor sees the victim."

Six weeks after the assault, the victim is advised to get a follow-up exam for venereal disease.

THERE ARE men and women volunteers involved with the crisis center. Ms. Kowalsky said female volunteers are used for initial contacts for female victims and that men are used to counsel families and lovers.

Volunteers for the center come from all areas of Oakland County.

For those who don't want to deal directly with telephone calls and with victims, they can work on community education.

Barb LeMiere, a Birmingham volunteer, is in charge of publicity and public relations. "I've been helping for almost three years," she said. "I wanted to do something active with the feminist movement and I wanted to see the results of my work."

Her efforts show up in the book "Rape," put out by the center that's a program of the Pontiac-North Oakland YWCA. She edited the book and was its photographer.

She also lectures on all aspects of rape, including myths, history and police procedures. She's lectured at several area high schools, colleges and to police recruits to sensitize them to rape and sexual abuse.

PEOPLE VOLUNTEER for different reasons. One of them, Ms. X, is involved because she was raped 17 years ago. She hasn't forgotten the experience, and wants to help others who have gone through it.

She remembers every detail of the crime, including her feelings of not knowing what was happening and how degrading it was when her assailant undressed her. She remembers the man walking her to the nearest emergency room and waiting with her until she got to see a social worker.

She also remembers what the attitudes were like 17 years ago. The police questioned her about why she was in the building where she was raped. She wasn't given any type of medical exam. Her mother thought if they didn't talk about what happened, the memories would just go away.

Ms. X can see the changes in the attitudes, and believes the overall approach is getting better. But there is still room for improvement.

Because of the social stigma attached to sexual abuses, many cases are not reported.

Ms. Mason said volunteers can file a third person report to the police if the victim won't file a report.

These third person reports are beneficial. From them the police can see if there's a common link among other reports.

"One woman was being raped by her boss. Other women were being raped by him also. If only one brave woman had filed a report, the rapes may have been stopped," Ms. Mason said.

MARY ELLEN Wasserberger, executive director for the Pontiac-North Oakland YWCA, said the agency was looking into programs for rape and domestic violence before they were made priority items by the National YWCA board in 1976.

The crisis center sponsored by the YWCA is a forerunner of the Domestic Violence Shelter that will be opened for Oakland County some time this year. The YWCA discovered the need for the shelter by calls that were coming over the crisis center hotline by battered wives.

The Oakland Crises Center for Rape

and Sexual Abuse was organized by a task force. Forming the force are the following agencies: Pontiac-North Oakland YWCA, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital-Social Service Department, Pontiac Police Department, Pontiac General Community Mental Health Clinic and the Oakland County Department of Health.

Committees included in the center task force are research and development, publicity, finance and fundraising, training, speakers bureau, victim advocates, third person reporting and victims rap group.

Hopefully the crisis number will help Oakland County avoid becoming like Detroit. In a recent FBI Crime Index Report, rape was the only serious crime that increased in Detroit last year. Other major crimes, such as murder, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft, decreased.



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