

Rape statistics reveal spiral

By JACKIE KLEIN

A sexy lady is sashaying down a dark street. A stranger jumps out of the shadows and rapes her. She asked for it because she was provocatively dressed.

That, according to Southfield police and social workers, is one of the most commonly believed of the numerous myths about rape.

Actually, the victim can be anyone from 18 months to 90 years old. It's not uncommon for men and boys to be sexually assaulted by other men. The way one is dressed isn't important because the victim, to the rapist, often is an object and not a person.

Rape isn't rampant in Southfield. But reported incidents are fairly frequent. Kris King, Southfield Human Resources Department counselor, and members of the city's police department are coordinators of a rape counseling service in the community.

"Usually, rape isn't a sexy crime," said Ms. King. "Most rapists use their victims to vent their anger against women. They generally want to control, intimidate and humiliate their victims."

"IT'S NORMAL for rape victims to feel guilty. They keep thinking they were at the wrong place at the wrong time when they were attacked. They believe, in some way, it was their fault."

Although law enforcement officials remember that women are victims of rape, and not on trial themselves, Ms. King contends some biased attitudes about these women's standards and character are still evident.

Southfield police and social workers

say they are seeing more prosecutions in rape cases because more women are reporting what often are referred to as "hidden crimes."

Rape, according to Detroit Councilwoman Erma Henderson, has skyrocketed, and FBI statistics show a nearly 80 per cent rise in incidents in six years.

Police files indicate that a rape occurs somewhere in the U.S. every 11 minutes. This, said Ms. Henderson, is only the tip of the iceberg. Rapes which never are reported to police could account for 10 times that number.

"Today, there is a fresh breeze of hope," the councilwoman said. "Women's groups throughout the country have untidely called for an end to the heinous crime of sexual assault in every form."

"IN RESPONDING to this pressure, the criminal justice system is engaged in a frank, open examination of the problem. In many areas, this has led to new laws, rules and regulations supporting victims. However, we have only kicked over the smooth rock in the garden and found the maggots underneath."

The system is slow to change. An incident happened in Southfield about two years ago. The victim was 16, terrified, humiliated and she had been raped.

She settled into the witness chair, fidgeted with her hands, tugged at her worn, blue jean jacket and quivered inside. The prosecutor disposed of the preliminaries quickly, walked past the defense table and asked if she saw her attacker in court.

In a quaking voice, almost inaudible,

she mumbled, "He's the one," as she pointed to her assailant. The victim said she had agreed to go to a party with him after meeting him at her cousin's house.

"He grabbed me and held me down and hit me again and again," she moaned, slumping in her chair. "He told me to undress and then he ripped off my skirt and sweater."

Then she spelled out in a low voice exactly what happened. She had to repeat it twice so the court reporter could hear. Her eyes avoided the men in the courtroom. She was cross-examined by defense attorneys before she left the room and sat alone, huddled at the end of a bench in the hallway.

ACCORDING to some attorneys, rape trials will continue to be ordeals for victims despite reformed legislation. Many victims still face explicit questioning about the nature of a sexual assault, often in a courtroom filled with a predominately male audience.

Southfield police officers and members of the city's department of human resources have participated in a special training program. It's designed to familiarize them with the vast number of emotional problems faced by victims of sexual assault and how to deal with them.

"Only about one of six rape victims report the crime," said Southfield Ptl. Donald MacKercher. "Cops appear to be cold and tactless instead of reassuring. They've been partly to blame for the low statistics on reporting sex crimes. Hopefully, this is changing."

Rape victims are urged to file reports with police and seek coun-

seling from the center, Ms. King said. By talking to a third person, individuals who have been sexually assaulted may give more information about the experience, she said. If the victim is trusting, it could save a lot of mental anguish.

Although new legislation went into effect in 1974 to cool the hot seat awaiting victims who pressed charges, it's hard to change preconceived notions, MacKercher admitted.

"A VICTIM of criminal sexual conduct feels horror, panic and like a filthy, dirty used hunk of meat," MacKercher said. "If we can get through to one sexually assaulted woman or man in 20, we will have accomplished something."

Southfield's police department arrest rate for sexual assaults is about 50 per cent. It's not always easy to prove, because most persons who commit rape are relatively sane, MacKercher maintained. About 50 per cent of rape victims know their attackers, he said.

"Some rapists have strong mother fixations or other mental hangups," he said. "But our statistics aren't really adequate to substantiate those theories."

"Often it's a matter of a guy being at the right place at the right time. Something snaps. Victims shouldn't blame themselves for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Law enforcement officials are learning to be sensitive to the horrors of rape. But it takes time for some to forget the 17-year-old rape law which did a better job of protecting criminals than victims."

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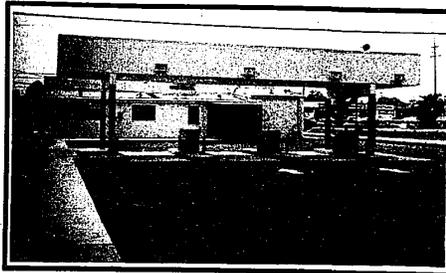
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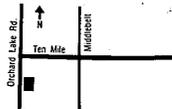
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