

Destroying The Myths of a 'Hushed Up' Crime

No Woman Asks For Rape Say Professionals In Handling Sexual Assault Cases, Studies

By Ruth J. Morris

Rape, the heinous and violent crime which in recent weeks has raised tensions in at least two of Rochester's suburban communities, is still a subject for speculation in some circles.

Is rape a sexual crime? A crime of violence?

Do rapists attack because of a lack of sexual outlets for some men?

And, is a widely held notion true...does rape occur because of the way women are dressing today? Do women, in fact, unwittingly or on purpose "ask for" rape?

The answers to these questions are readily given by persons whose professions

Moreover, they say, it is societal attitudes that increase difficulties in apprehending and prosecuting rapists.

Susan Seidel, an energetic young woman who teaches community medicine to medical and other graduate students at the University of Rochester Medical Center, has devoted many hours during the past two years to coordinating the efforts of the Rape Crisis Service in Rochester.

She spent some time last week talking about rape and particularly about rapists...who they are and why they do what they do.

"It is a major myth that

"Most rapists plan their attacks just as most (other) criminals plan their crimes . . . sex is generally not their primary goal."

bring them in contact with rapists and rape victims. And the answers dispel many of the myths surrounding this "hushed up" crime.

The professionals say emphatically that women neither "ask for" nor cause rape to occur. They are victims and are in no way responsible for what has happened to them.

rapists rape because they are ungratified sexually," she said, "and that most men rape on a sudden impulse because they find a woman sexually attractive.

"Most rapists plan their attacks just as most criminals plan their crimes. Rape is a crime of violence and sex is generally not its primary goal."



RAPE CRISIS SERVICE COORDINATOR—Susan Seidel, who teaches community medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center, took an hour out from her busy schedule to discuss some prevalent myths about rape.

Mrs. Seidel said extensive research done with rapists who were convicted as repeaters, revealed certain personality characteristics which form a composite of the types of men who rape.

"They have basically two motivations," she said. "One is anger at some significant woman in their lives, a mother, wife or girlfriend; the other is a power

make her acquaintance, try to get to know her. He is probably fantasizing a lot, thinking 'If she has sex with me she'll fall in love with me and want me to come back.'

"This is the type of rape which is difficult for the police to deal with...after a few drinks is it rape or seduction?

"This type of rapist doesn't usually beat a woman up and

"He may make her acquaintance, try to get to know her . . . fantasizing . . . 'If she has sex with me she'll fall in love with me . . .'"

motivation...a man may feel sexually inadequate and needs to overpower women to help his self esteem."

Ms. Seidel said one third of rapes generally are of the former motivation and two thirds of the latter.

"In the case of the rapist with extreme anger the victim will often be brutally beaten, far more than is necessary just to subdue her," she said.

In the second group, the rape is premeditated and usually the rapist gets to know his victim ahead of time," she said.

"The man may follow the victim's activities for a while," she said. "He may

uses only enough force to get her to submit. He may use a gun or a knife to threaten her," she said.

Ms. Seidel said there is also a small percentage of rapists who fall into a psychotic category of sadists who make the biggest headlines. Currently such a person is at large in California having raped and killed 11 women, she said.

"The way women dress or behave has nothing to do with rape," emphasized Ms. Seidel who noted that many of the victims she has worked with were not attractive and not well dressed.

"There are many dowdy
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women who are not the least interested in sex or clothes," she said.

Investigator Jeannette Farrar of the Sheriff's Department agreed emphatically.

"It has nothing to do with how a woman looks, or her shape," said Investigator Farrar.

"That's (expletive deleted)! In my 20 years with the department I've never seen a gorgeous victim. The woman who was raped in Pittsford last month was in her bed asleep...what did she do?"

"The old woman who was raped in an area hospital last year...what did she do? Certainly no one was watching her walk...and it wasn't the way she dressed that turned that guy on," she said.

Both Seidel and Farrar believe that the attitudes which place the blame on rape victims have to be changed in the public mind.

"The police, and the courts, and the prosecutors' attitudes have improved tremendously in recent years," said Ms. Seidel. "The only thing that hasn't changed is the attitude of the juries."

Investigator Farrar agrees, saying that the "general

public's attitude is still poor. People still believe that a rape cannot actually happen.

"Often I hear the old comment that a girl can run faster with her skirt up than a man can with his pants down," she said wryly. "This might be 1977 but people's attitudes leave a lot to be desired."

"These attitudes give the victims feelings of shame and guilt," she said. "They think

"The way women dress or behave has nothing to do with rape . . . there are many dowdy women . . . The woman who was raped in Pittsford last month was in her bed asleep . . . what did she do?"

they have done something to bring this on."

Patricia Marks, assistant district attorney who has prosecuted many rape cases during her two years with the D.A.'s office, agrees with Ms. Seidel's opinions of juror's attitudes.

"Lots of people are still hung up on the myths," she said. "Many people have preconceived notions and that is a difficult aspect of

prosecuting these cases.

"Many people put themselves in the place of the victim," she said, recalling a case in which a young woman was forced to get into a car and raped at gunpoint.

"The forewoman of the jury refused to vote for conviction because she was familiar with guns and had had a lot of experience with them and said that that gun should not have frightened the young

woman that much," Ms. Marks said.

Although she said that things are improving, she still has encountered problems in the judicial process. She recalled a judge saying of a sexual abuse victim, "She shouldn't have been hitchhiking, she learned a valuable lesson."

On the more positive side, Ms. Marks said that laws regarding rape are changing

and that a recent decision redefined the "forceful compulsion" rule which said that a woman had to "resist to the utmost of her strength" before rape could be proven.

The new law states that a

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woman must offer "reasonable resistance" which Ms. Marks believes takes into consideration certain circumstances in which it may be safer not to fight.

She said the philosophy underlying the old ruling was the philosophy of which Investigator Farrar spoke, that woman "want to be raped."

Seidel addressed herself to this point succinctly. "Maybe all women would like to be seduced gently," she said. "Nobody wants to be raped."

Seidel, Farrar and Marks are all working to eradicate the myths surrounding rape today. Through education of

the public they believe a greater percentage of rapes will be reported and a greater percentage of rapists apprehended and convicted.

"We have to educate our sons so that they don't

become rapists and our daughters so that they don't become victims," said Ms. Seidel.

"There are those who say that so many women are used to being exploited and used so much of the time that rape isn't really a special case.

"Some say women are so trained to be polite they wouldn't use karate if they knew it. Men on the other hand, are the victims of the cultural myth of "macho."

"They have to be dominant, and a woman has to know what a man is thinking. She has to say no," she said.

"There is so much confusion about what men and women expect from one

another. Something may start out as seduction, and if the woman says no and the man becomes threatened because of his own problems it can turn into rape.

"She might have thought he was a nice person to have a drink with and that if she said no he would respect it. There is so much men and women don't understand about each other."

Ms. Seidel said that the women's movement has had a double-edged effect on rape statistics in recent years. On the one hand, she said, it has urged women to get control of their lives and to not be afraid to live. On the other hand it has made women more vulnerable by going out more and by making them more powerful and assertive.

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"Many men who rape are more threatened by powerful, assertive women. This may compound the problem," she said.

"The incidence of rape has increased each year," she said. "There may be more rapes or there may be more people reporting them. As society's viewpoint changes about rape victims and as they are supported by the police and the courts that may change even more."