

Rape stats vary in Eugene

As bedroom attacks increase, many go unreported

By HEIDI SWILLINGER
Of the Emerald

"The woman said she was attacked shortly after 5 a.m. when the man broke in to her apartment, deputies said. The suspect was described only as a white adult of medium build."

The Eugene Register-Guard, Sept. 7, 1981.

Nearly half the rapes reported in Eugene happen in the victim's home, says Gail Wiemann, director of the Rape Crisis Network. "The ones we hear about mostly don't occur on the street."

In fact, most rapes tend to involve acquaintances of the victim, Wiemann says.

This may explain why reported rape figures vary so much between the Eugene Police Department, which received 38 reports of rape in 1980, and the Rape Crisis Network, a support group for rape victims that counseled 132 rape victims in the same year.

Even so, Wiemann says she is not certain every rape that occurred in Eugene last year was reported to her agency.

"Rape is the most unreported crime all over the nation," she says, citing FBI figures estimating that only 10 to 25 percent of all rapes are reported to the police.

Why?

"If (a victim) is attacked on the street at night and beaten, then they have a good case," Wiemann says. "That's the kind of case that gets prosecuted and more than likely will be won."

But more than half the rapes reported to the Rape Crisis Network occurred between people who knew each other. "When (the rapist) is someone you know," Wiemann says, "it's harder to prove."

Women don't report rape in that situation, she says, because they're afraid "he'll be believed first."

Or they're afraid of retaliation. Or, Wiemann says they figure "it's not going to do any good — that few (rapists) get to court or get convicted."

She calls this idea a misconception.

"A lot of rapists get caught. The question is, how vigorously are the police going to pursue it? The DA and the police want to find out if a case will hold up in court."

Rape is difficult to prove in court, she says. "There are all kinds of things that don't stand up well in court, but they're scary as hell."

For instance, a woman who gives in to a rapist without a struggle because he has threatened to harm her children may fear that juries will view her surrender as consent.

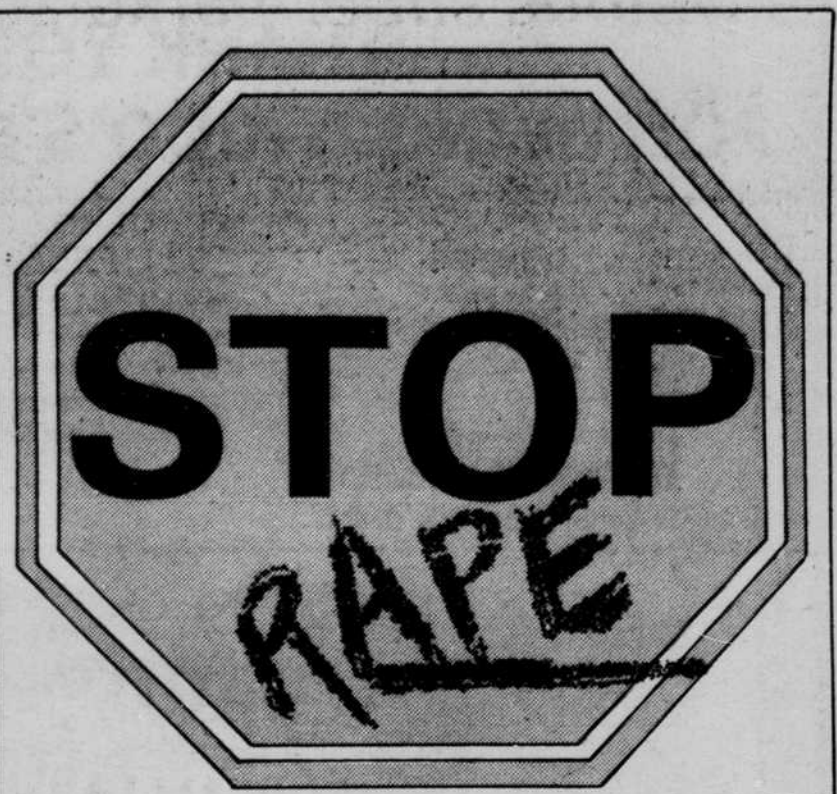
But under Oregon law, first-degree rape is defined as forcible sexual intercourse by a male to a female, which may include threats of severe bodily injury or death to the victim or to a third person (such as a child), says Marcia Morgan, coordinator of the Lane County Sheriff's Rape Team.

Under state law, Morgan says, women don't have to prove they fought back during the rape if they gave in because they were afraid of their attacker's threats.

Another reason women are afraid to report rapes is they are afraid of embarrassment. Television scenes in which a woman's past sexual history may be dragged out in court and used against her are inaccurate, Morgan says. According to state law, a woman's past sexual experiences may not be brought up in court unless it is determined by the judge outside the courtroom that her past experience is relevant to the case.

An example of "relevant" would be if a woman had intercourse with her boyfriend on Saturday night and was raped on Sunday morn-

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Emerald Graphic

Experts talk about prevention tactics

By HEIDI SWILLINGER
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There is no sure-fire method for preventing rape, says Marcia Morgan, coordinator of the Lane County Sheriff's office Rape Team.

"You cannot rely on one thing," she says. "Each person and situation is different."

Spray chemicals that have received much promotion in recent years may be effective, Morgan says, but the shelf life is only about a year. Women may carry an unused can of chemical deterrent for a couple of years, only to have it fail when it's needed because the spray has lost its potency.

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