

Students increase and so do questions on rape

By Jim Moore
Of the Emerald

The influx of University students into Eugene each fall is matched by an increase in the number of questions about rape, rape crisis workers report.

Calls to the Rape Crisis Network dramatically increase between the months of September and October, a jump contrary to national trends, according to figures compiled by the Network's director Gail Wiemann.

Wiemann says the totals of other months generally concur with national totals and she feels there is a correlation between the rise in calls and return of students.

"Nationally, both rape victims and rapists are between the ages of 15 and 25," according to Wiemann, so the fall increase of activity at the Network does not surprise her.

But she is alarmed by another aspect of the statistics, a steady rise in the number of calls to the Network.

Queries to the Network's hotline jumped 13 percent between 1981 and 1982 and calls received through May of 1983 already rival 1981's total.

Ironically, her figures, as well as those compiled by the Eugene police department, show a decline in the number of reported rapes between 1981 and 1982. But the 94 rapes already reported to the Network through May 1983 threaten to make this year's total exceed any of the past.

Another irony surfaces when comparing rapes reported to the police department with those to the Rape Crisis Network. The Network receives as many as three times more reports than the police.

Wiemann says that is because people generally feel uneasy dealing with such emotional and traumatic tragedies as rape or child molesting. Police, rather than offering support or comfort for the victim or the victim's family, are usually concerned with asking questions and gathering information pertinent to a court case.

The Network, however, provides men and women trained to listen and console, as well as offer

pragmatic advice.

Wiemann and her co-worker Margo Belder, who is the Network's community education director, have trained volunteers to deal with the sensitive questions and problems of callers. Those volunteers have gained experience through the years, making the Network more attractive than the police, Belder says.

Another reason few victims contact police is they may want to protect the rapist.

"Most rapists are known by the woman who is victimized," says Wiemann, who started at the Network as a volunteer in 1979. The scenario commonly presented by television and movies of a psychotic loner roaming streets and preying on unknown women is a misrepresentation of how most rapes occur, she says.

Such depictions disturb Wiemann because of the messages sent to the general public about what rape is and how it happens.

She points out that juries are reluctant to find guilt when the victim knows the rapist, theorizing that somehow the woman was partly responsible for what happened. After all, the rapist was a friend or relative or neighbor, not an escapee from a mental institution.

Consequently, district attorneys are bringing to trial fewer and fewer rape cases involving familiar parties because the chances for a conviction are slim.

The result is, those rapes that happen most often have become those that are least prosecuted.

That trend is particularly distressing with the current rise of calls to the Network and indications that they may increase.

One cause of the Network's increased activity in the past few years may be related to the economy and to the swelling of the unemployment ranks experienced in Lane County, Wiemann says.

Increased stress in men because of loss of job or income often manifests itself in a violent reaction sometimes directed at family members such as a wife or children, she says.

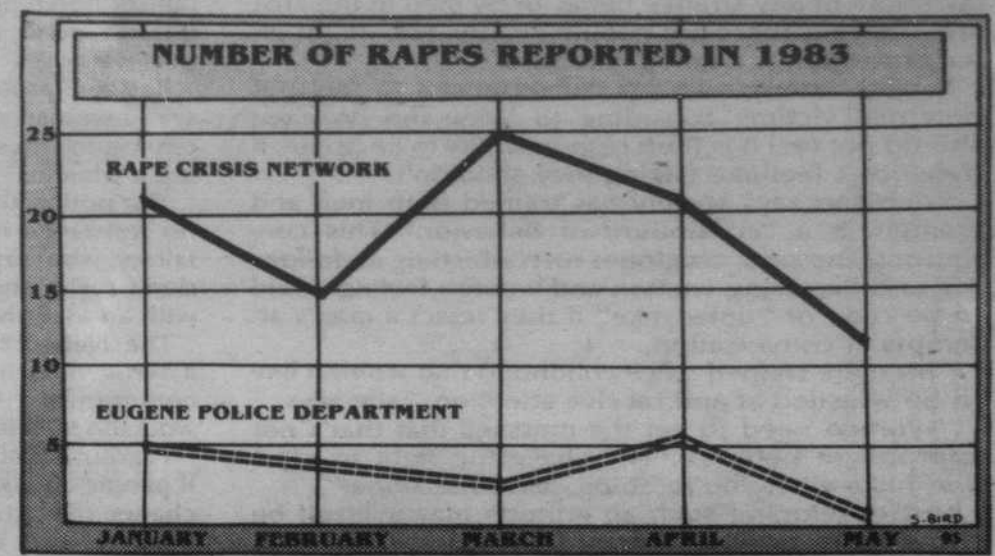
The decrease in the Sheriff's department staff and response capability due to a defeat of a county tax levy might increase the possibility of a Lane County woman being attacked, speculates Eugene police detective David Poppe. And that pertains to women in Eugene as well.

"I wouldn't doubt there would be some increase in Eugene," says Poppe, who works as a sex-crime investigator.

Wiemann says she agrees with that assessment, but adds she is more concerned with the other result of the vote. With the crowded condition of local and state jails, she fears even less prosecution of typical rape cases, believing they will receive an even lower priority by the district attorney's office than they have in the past.

Poppe concurs, saying he expects a "more stringent screening of cases." Probably only the worst cases will come to trial now, he says, and in the case of rape that means an attack by a stranger.

District Attorney Pat Horton has never hidden the fact that he dis-



Graphic by Shawn Bird

dains taking to court a case he might lose. After the county tax levy defeat, he announced an even harder approach, saying his office would now only prosecute those cases certain to bring convictions.

In the case of rape, that means many rapes, even if reported and acted upon by the police, may

never reach a courtroom.

With the possibility of an increase in the incidence of rape and a decrease of police help in Lane County's future, Wiemann and the Network have some advice to offer women.

Wiemann urges an increased awareness by women who take to

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