

RAPE CASES PROBLEMATIC, POLICE SAY DETROIT REPORTS INCREASE

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On a Friday morning last November, an 11-year-old girl walked to school like thousands of other Detroit children.

But instead of spending the day safely in class and among her friends at Farwell Middle School, police say, she was grabbed off the street by several youths and gang-raped, a trauma that could scar her the rest of her years.

The girl's ordeal was but one of 1,657 reports of sexual contact imposed by violence or threat in Detroit last year, an increase of 233 -- 16.4 percent -- from 1989, according to police and FBI crime figures released Sunday.

On Monday, Detroit Police Chief Stanley Knox said, "I don't think anybody knows why rapes are up," but he suspects the increase is partly because people are becoming "more at ease in reporting rapes than in the past."

Crime figures released Sunday by the FBI showed that Detroit, the nation's seventh-largest city in 1990, ranked fifth in per capita rapes. The 1,657 sexual assaults were the most in 11 years.

Knox and other police officials described the crime as one that police take extremely seriously for its devastating effects on victims, and one that presents many difficulties for police.

Deputy Chief James Younger said, "The majority of rapes happen between people who know each other," making those cases virtually impossible to head off through prevention efforts like more police patrols.

He also noted that sex crime is different than an offense such as homicide, in which a corpse proves there was a victim. "You have to go through an entire investigation" to determine whether a complaint is legitimate, Younger said.

Detroit Police make arrests in about 60 percent of sex crime cases, he said.

"The primary thing is to talk to the victim as soon as possible after the crime," said Younger. "After talking to them, you go to the crime scene and try to gather as much facts and evidence as you can from the scene and from witnesses. Based on that, you try to bring in a perpetrator."

He said the major change recently in the investigative field involves evidence technology such as DNA fingerprinting, which uses samples of body fluids to identify genetic traits unique to an attacker. Police also make use of a computer-aided search system of fingerprint records, which led to the arrest of a suspect in an Indian Village area rape and robbery last year.

Cmdr. Robert Hislop, head of the major crimes division, said sex crime investigations are sensitive. "You're dealing with cases that you have a great deal of compassion for, women being taken advantage of and brutalized," he said.

Victims of rape, unlike most other crimes, wrestle with many personal pressures before going to police, if they go at all. Experts estimate that as few as 10 percent of sexual assaults are reported.

"It's not unusual for the victim to come in late," said Hislop. "These people have been brutalized, and many things go through their minds. They have husbands, families.

"There is going to be a lot of embarrassment after they report it. They don't like to have to sit and talk about it. If you had been raped or sodomized, would you feel comfortable sitting in a room with spectators and reporters . . . and telling all about it?"

Police precincts conduct school-hour patrols in an effort to prevent attacks like the one on the Farwell Middle School student. In that case, one juvenile is imprisoned after a no-contest plea and four others face trial June 10 on various criminal sexual conduct and firearms charges.

For the victims of sexual assault, life's daily routine can be dramatically affected.

Marc Hart, a Wayne County assistant prosecutor, oversaw the 1988 trials against convicted east side serial rapist **Samson Koger**. Hart said one victim, a single professional woman, "bought a gun and carried it everywhere with her, including the shower."

"I remember specifically that she said it would forever change the way she looked at men. Her sex life came to a screeching halt. I believe she told me she had recurring nightmares about the attack."

Hart noted that boys and men also are rape victims.

Officer Gail Barnes of the Detroit Police crime prevention section said someone threatened with rape should "assess the situation before doing anything" that might result in further physical harm.

"Maybe talk with the person, suggest you may have AIDS," said Barnes, who noted that sometimes talking will save a life, even if a rape can't be prevented.

Barnes said it makes good sense to learn basic self-defense courses that teach how to get out of holds and fight off the grabbing hands of an attacker. Such courses often are available at YWCAs and community centers.

Barnes said women sometimes freeze during a rape situation. "They don't think about running," she said, adding that even at night there may be fire stations or 24-hour gas stations open where a person can run for help.

Pauline Bart and Patricia O'Brien, authors of the 1985 book, "Stopping Rape, Successful Survival Strategies," advocate a more assertive approach, saying their research indicates women should confront their attackers, and that women risk little further injury by doing so.

The authors said that "for a woman to survive unraped, particularly in an urban setting, she must learn basic mistrust."

SELF-DEFENSE

The book "Stopping Rape, Successful Survival Strategies" suggests six types of rape defense: fleeing, screaming or yelling to attract attention, begging or pleading, attempting to reason or stalling, focusing attention on some diversion, and physical force. The book says women risk little further injury by a confrontational response.

Memo: SEE ALSO METRO FINAL EDITION, Page 1A

Edition: METRO EDITION

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

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