

4 MEN SOUGHT FOR VAN RAPES DETROIT POLICE TRACE PATTERN

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Detroit police are searching for four **men** they say have abducted several women and schoolgirls at gunpoint on the city's west side and gang-raped them **in a van** .

Police believe the **men** are responsible for at least four **rapes** since Oct. 18. On two other occasions, three girls -- ages 12, 14 and 18 -- fled when a **man** tried to get them to come to his **van** or watched them **in** a suspicious manner.

"Some of them have been beaten," Inspector Michael Hall, who runs the department's sex crimes unit, said Thursday of the victims. "After the sexual assaults, they're released."

In some cases, he said, the **men** wore ski masks.

Hall said most of the attacks took place near the Hubbell- Fenkell area about a half-mile from Cooley High School. He said his investigators discovered a possible pattern this week.

"Four **men** driving a blue-gray **van** approach the victim," Hall said. " **In** a couple of occasions they have been schoolgirls going to or from Cooley High School. They force the victim into the **van** and sexually assault her **in** the **van** . We're asking the public for any information they might have on the blue gray **van** occupied by four individuals."

He said the **rape** victims were ages 15, 16, 30 and 35.

"We began seeing the similarities this Wednesday," Hall said. "For the last few days, they haven't hit."

Hall said investigators are trying to develop composite sketches of the suspects.

Investigators say they don't believe the perpetrators are choosing victims because of the way they look.

"I think they're just opportunists taking advantage of the situation they find themselves **in** ," Hall said, noting that **in** every case the victims were alone.

Hall said police are looking for a full-size blue-gray **van** with solid metal panels on the sides; however, the suspects may be using more than one vehicle. One of the victims reported seeing a black **van** .

In another situation, two girls, ages 12 and 14, reported a **man in** a beige **van** yelled for them "to come here."

"The victims, however, run away, and that's what we're advising -- that if any young lady is suspicious of anybody **in** a car -- to seek help immediately," Hall said. "To run. Run up to a house or a neighbor."

In an incident Nov. 2, police said a **man in** a blue-gray **van** watched an 18-year-old woman, who became frightened and fled.

Police Chief Isaiah McKinnon said he hoped the community would respond with an all-out effort by parents and others to keep an eye out for young women.

"Anyone can be an active part **in** policing our community by being aware of things, making the young ladies comfortable going to and from school," McKinnon said.

"These are the kinds of things that will help all of us **in** terms of trying not only to find out who these individuals are but to rid our community of crime," he said.

Cooley High School Principal Posey Williams said he was unaware of the **rapes** . Had they known, he said, officials would have instructed students to take precautions.

"You see guys stop and the girls go up and talk to them," he said. "We're constantly warning them."

Williams said the school's doors open at 7:30 a.m. and a large portion of the students arrive by 8 a.m.

Patrick Sadler, 37, his wife and three small children live near the corner of Davison and Roselawn. He remembers hearing of a **rape** that happened **in** his area last summer, but news of the Nov. 1 **rape** came as a shock.

"This is about my first time about hearing about it," he said. "I try to protect my family. When my wife come home she blows the horn and I watch her or now we're **in** the same car. You can find crime wherever you go. Even **in** the nice neighborhoods, it can happen."

Although his children are young, 9 months to 6 years old, as soon as they can understand, he explains what to do when strangers approach.

Anyone with information should call the sex crimes unit at 1-313-596-1950 anytime.

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