

MAN CHARGED IN RAPE, BEATING OF GIRL X

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Friday, April 4, 1997

Author: Associated Press

CHICAGO -- A 25-year-old ex-convict was charged Thursday in the rape and beating of the 9-year-old child known as Girl X, nearly three months after she was found unconscious in a public housing stairwell.

Patrick Sykes allegedly raped, choked and poisoned Girl X for sexual gratification, said Chicago police spokesman Paul Jenkins.

"He saw the victim walking alone and went after her," Jenkins said.

Sykes, who was in prison from 1991-1993 for attempted criminal sexual assault, confessed to the attack and revealed details not known to the public, Jenkins said. He was charged with aggravated criminal sexual assault, aggravated kidnapping, predatory sexual assault, heinous battery, unlawful restraint and aggravated sexual assault of a minor.

Sykes was visiting the Cabrini-Green apartment complex when he saw the girl in a stairwell, police said.

He pulled the girl into a vacant apartment and choked her into unconsciousness before assaulting her, Jenkins said, and poured a gasoline-type substance down her throat and scrawled on her body with a marker.

Jenkins said a tip phoned to police 10 days ago led to Sykes. He said police had obtained evidence that supported the confession.

As police followed the clues, the child was embraced by Chicagoans as a symbol of violence. Hundreds attended vigils. The Rev. Jesse Jackson helped raise money for psychiatric care. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan prayed at her bedside.

The girl, whose name is being kept secret, Monday laughed, cried and smiled for the first time since the Jan. 9 attack. But the girl still communicates by shaking her head, and doctors do not know her prognosis.

After the attack, the girl was found with a gasoline-like substance in her stomach and a pitchfork emblem of the Gangster Disciples street gang scrawled across her body, possibly with a marking pen.

With the girl unable to describe her attacker, police scrambled for clues, even showing the graffiti to a handwriting expert. But police said Thursday the attack was not gang-related.

Police interviewed 400-500 people, Jenkins said.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

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Index Terms: CHICAGO ; RACIAL ; ASSAULT ; SEX ; CHILD ; ARREST

Dateline: CHICAGO

Record Number: 9701100122

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