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MALE RAPE VICTIMS: BREAKING THE SILENCE

by KIRAN MEHTA

The topic of male rape is not usually taken seriously in the media or society. In fact, male rape is regarded as a joke in our popular culture. People make light of prison rape with shower jokes (e.g., don't drop your soap), or brush off brutal hazing rituals that men engage in with sports or fraternities as rites of passage.¹

However, things are beginning to change. In San Francisco, a report was released indicating that incidents of male on male rape had doubled in that city from 2005 to 2006.² To combat this problem, the San Francisco District Attorney's office launched a public awareness advertising campaign.³ The ads featured men with captions such as "I thought he was a great guy. . . until he raped me" and "You are not alone" with information on where male victims

can seek help.⁴ The campaign is believed to be the first of its kind in the nation led by a District Attorney's office.⁵

Speaking about male victims, District Attorney Harris said, "rape is rape, and gender, gender identity and sexual orientation don't change that fact one bit."⁶

"This is an issue that makes everyone uncomfortable and because of that, it deserves all our concerted attention," said Tom Ammiano, who sits on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.⁷

Supervisor Bevan Duffy agreed, saying that "a strong public awareness campaign is the best antidote to this chronic underreporting of gay sexual assault cases."⁸

MALE RAPE IN THE NEWS

As public awareness increases about male rape victims, the media begins to report more on the issue. In Houston, Texas, during the winter of 2006, a man was serially raping other men.⁹ A total of five attacks occurred.¹⁰ Kaethe Morris Hoffer, an attorney who co-authored the Illinois Gender Violence Act, commented that an Associated Press article about the Houston assaults generally did a good job of reporting the facts, except for one sentence minimizing the incidents.¹¹ The article states, "[t]hree of the attacks occurred in the city, and the other two on the outskirts of town. . . *no one was seriously hurt.*"¹² (emphasis added)

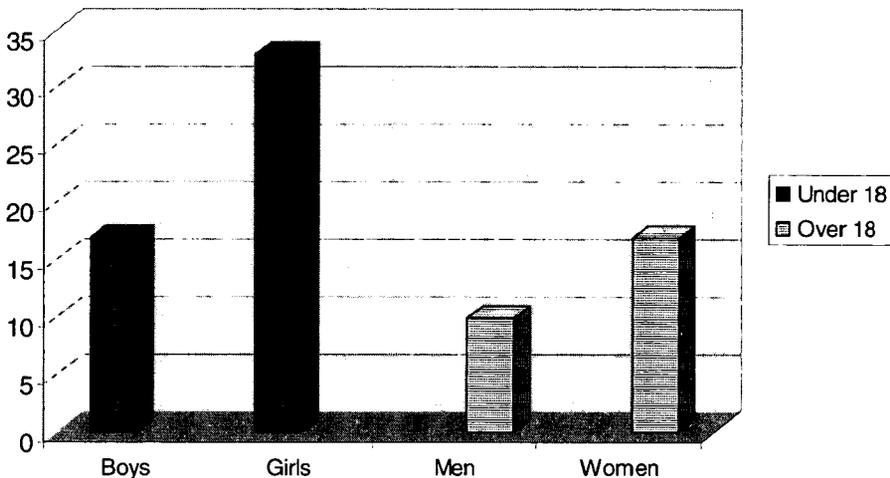
"It is ridiculous to ever state that a rape victim was not seriously hurt, but it might be easy to say because we are taught to think men cannot be victims," said Morris Hoffer.¹³

More recently in Ohio, six Tallmadge high school football players were suspended for their involvement in a hazing incident that has two of the players facing rape-related charges.¹⁴ Police records say the players inserted a foreign object into the rectum of a teammate.¹⁵ In fact, a 1999 survey found that 80 percent of college athletes have been victims of hazing, and 60 percent of athletes surveyed said they would not report a hazing incident.¹⁶

THE STATISTICS MAY NOT TELL THE WHOLE STORY

Many people are aware of the statistic that one in six women will be raped in her lifetime.¹⁷ However, people are usually more surprised to hear that men are victims, too. In fact, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) estimates that 5 to 10 percent of all reported rapes involve male victims.¹⁸ The Department of Justice states that one in 33 adult men have been the victim of rape or attempted rape.¹⁹

However, these statistics are misleading according to Detective Sergeant Judy Woods of the San Diego Police Department's Sex Crimes Unit.²⁰

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS:
PERCENTAGE OF VICTIMS BY AGE AND GENDER

From the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault Manual,
By the Numbers: Sexual Violence Statistics, 2006

"It's important to note that when you see the FBI statistics that they are very specific about what rape is," said Woods, who explained, "for them [rape] is defined specifically as a penis in a vagina, which fails to include, then, forced penis to anal penetration, forced penis to oral penetration, and forced object to anal penetration. Those are considered sexual assaults."²¹

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Male victims are starting to speak out and get involved in the anti-rape movement. At Northern Illinois University, Gabe Wright helped form a group called "Men Against Sexual Interpersonal Violence."²² "We try to get men to understand what women go through. Many women go to their male friends for help after they've been raped because they see [men] as protectors. We try to get men to respond better. Most men usually will respond by saying, 'I'm gonna beat him up' but that takes away the woman's power and control *again*. We want men to say 'I'm sorry, what can I do for you? You tell me what you need.' With any victim, you have to give them the power and control back," said Wright.²³

Wright was the victim of rape himself when he was 22 years old.²⁴ He was fishing at his favorite local fishing spot when three guys approached him.²⁵ They started talking to him about his problems with his then-wife while drinking a few beers.²⁶

"These guys saw me as depressed and I didn't really think anything of it," Wright recalled. "We were just hanging out and talking and the next thing I know, they had a gun on me. They beat me and raped me."²⁷

Wright did not tell anyone about the rape for six years.²⁸ "[The rape] took control of my mind because I was reliving it over and over and over again. My friends and family kept wondering what was wrong with me. When I told everyone [that I was raped], they said 'well that makes sense now.'"²⁹

RAPE CONTINUES TO GO UNREPORTED

Only 36 percent of female rape victims report the crime to police.³⁰ Male rape victims report the crime even less.³¹ There are many reasons why men do not report being raped, according to Morris Hoffer. She says men's upbringing conflicts with their ability to say "I was sexually assaulted."³²

"Men consider themselves immune from injuries, and there is an association with not being harmable" because they are supposed to be in control, strong and always able to protect themselves, according to Morris Hoffer.³³

Jesse Pierce, a Trainer from the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault's Training Institute, agreed that this upbringing makes it difficult for men to disclose to authorities when they have been raped because men are not "supposed" to talk about their feelings.³⁴ Instead, many men find more gender-specific ways to express their emotions such as anger and violence.³⁵ Because a male victim may already be questioning his manhood, he is less likely to seek help. As a result, his feelings manifest through physical acts of violence.³⁶

Another reason men are less likely to report, according to Pierce, is that services are often geared toward women.³⁷ In fact, many rape crisis centers have titles with "woman" in the name, or the rape crisis center is run out of the local YWCA.³⁸

In some larger cities, however, there are more gender neutral rape crisis centers and more resources for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender victims.³⁹ For example, in parts of Southern Illinois, such as Carbondale or Marion, the only rape crisis centers are called "A Woman's Center" and "Women's Center Rape Crisis Services."⁴⁰ In Chicago, the largest rape crisis center is called "Rape Victim Advocates."⁴¹

"Men may not know resources exist for them, or the services geared more toward women serve as a barrier for men to seek help," said Pierce.⁴²

Men also may feel confused about what happened to them because of their body's physiological response.⁴³ Some men experience an involuntary erection, or ejaculate during the assault, but these responses are physiological, and do not equate to consent or pleasure.⁴⁴ According to Paul Sussman, a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and someone who works in the area of sexual violence, this can unfortunately result in the victim keeping silent about the assault.⁴⁵

MEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

For Wright, positive results in the anti-rape movement occur when people start talking about male rape.⁴⁶

"People should be able to sit down in a Starbucks and have a conversation about rape," said Wright. "We can talk about war, politics, religion, but we

can't talk about rape. . .because it is so personal. And male rape is even more personal and more of a taboo."⁴⁷

Wright is hopeful that in telling his story, other male victims will come forward.⁴⁸ "Talking about it with someone makes a difference and helped me move on," Wright said. "I know that it can do the same for other men."⁴⁹

NOTES

- 1 Telephone interview with Kaethe Morris Hoffer, P.C. (October 2, 2007).
- 2 Press Release, San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris, Supervisors Dufty and Ammiano, Chief Heather Fong and CUAV Launch Awareness Campaign Against Gay Rape, (June 20, 2007).
- 3 *Id.*
- 4 *Id.*
- 5 *Id.*
- 6 *Id.*
- 7 *Id.*
- 8 *Id.*
- 9 CBSNews.com, *Male-Stalking Rapist Puzzles Experts*, (Dec. 26, 2006), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/26/national/main2299340.shtml>.
- 10 *Id.*
- 11 *supra* note 1
- 12 *supra* note 9
- 13 *supra* note 1
- 14 Tom Gaffney, Ohio.com, *Hazing Allegations Overshadow Team: Undefeated Talmadge Now Six Players Short*. (Oct. 9, 2007). <http://www.ohio.com/news/10334312.html>
- 15 *Id.*
- 16 CNN.com, *Study: 80% of College Athletes Victims of Hazing*, (Aug. 30, 1999). <http://www.cnn.com/US/9908/30/sports.hazing/index.html>
- 17 Brian Van De Mark, *Male Rape: when Mr. Nice turns nasty*, (July, 12, 2007), <http://www.gaylesbiantimes.com/?id=10134&issue=1020>
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 *Id.*
- 20 *Id.*
- 21 *Id.*
- 22 Interview with Gabe Wright, in Chicago, Il. (October 12, 2007).
- 23 *Id.*
- 24 *Id.*
- 25 *Id.*
- 26 *Id.*
- 27 *Id.*
- 28 *Id.*
- 29 *Id.*

30 United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Selected Findings, *Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to the police and medical attention, 1992-2000*. (August, 2002) <http://ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>

31 *supra* note 1

32 *Id.*

33 *Id.*

34 Telephone interview with Jesse Pierce, Trainer, Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault Training Institute (September 26, 2007).

35 *Id.*

36 *Id.*

37 *Id.*

38 *Id.*

39 *Id.*

40 Yahoo! Local Yellow Pages, <http://yp.yahoo.com> (last visited Nov. 16, 2007). Carbondale and Marion were entered as the location and the words "rape crisis center" were entered as the search terms.

41 Yahoo! Local Yellow Pages, <http://yp.yahoo.com> (last visited Nov. 16, 2007). Chicago was entered as the location and the words "rape crisis center" were entered as the search terms.

42 *supra* note 34

43 Rape Victim Advocates, Male Survivors, <http://www.rapevictimadvocates.org/male.html>, (last visited Oct. 3, 2007).

44 *Id.*

45 *supra* note 17

46 *supra* note 22

47 *Id.*

48 *Id.*

49 *Id.*