

# Rape: a violent crime

by **Loreen Lennon**

Women are beginning to understand that it isn't *their fault* if they're raped, but they have to remember they are still the ones who suffer.

Edmonton Rape Crisis Centre director Marie Laing says that women must take extra precautions to protect themselves even if it doesn't seem fair.

The Rape Crisis Centre is a non-profit society, staffed and administered largely by trained volunteers. It operates a 24-hour crisis line (429-0023) and provides information and emotional and legal support for victims of rape and sexual assault.

Since her appointment in April, Laing has thought a lot about the myths surrounding rape.

"Rape is an assault, usually committed out of a sense of anger, not passion." Most attackers, she points out, are under thirty but it's not true that they seek out beautiful, sexy women.

"It's the victims' vulnerability that attracts the rapist," she says.

The Centre has dealt with male victims and with women as young as six months and as old as 88 years. Most rape victims are females between the ages of 14-24 but Laing believes this is due to the active lifestyle of younger women, rather than their sexual attractiveness.

She sees rape as a violent crime against defenceless people. "Society must stop accepting and thereby condoning all forms of violence."

From January 1 to October 1, 1978, the Rape Crisis Centre handled 188 calls. These included cases involving indecent assault, indecent exposure, battered women and even a call from the wife of a rapist. Rape itself accounted for 114 of the calls.

Laing says it's impossible to describe the typical rapist and therefore these are no hard and fast methods for dealing with an attacker. It's better to understand what can be done to prevent rape in the first place.

Laing points out that university women are prime targets because of their active lifestyles. She says they are often unaware of the risks they take. For example, many of them are dependent on others for transportation, and have a false sense of their ability to take care of themselves.

"Many of the rapes and attempted rapes we deal with occur when a young woman accepts a ride home from a relative stranger, perhaps after a party," Laing notes. Being aware

of the potentially high risk situations is the first defense against them, she says.

Statistics on the incidence of rape are so poor that Laing hesitates to comment on the chance of a conviction. "Only one in ten rapes is reported and of these, very few attackers are charged," she explains. Attorney-General Ron Basford last year estimated that only 1.6% of rapists are ever convicted.

"That's less than half the normal rate for conviction in any other crime. It's changing slowly but, something's still very wrong," says Laing.

For more information, call the Rape Crisis Centre business line: 422-5957.



"Women was made to yield to man and put up with his injustice."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

## A legal perspective Proposed Rape Law

by **Margaret Donovan**

Bill C-52 which would replace rape, attempted rape and indecent assault of both sexes with Aggravated Indecent Assault and Indecent Assault, was introduced into the House of Commons last year.

The alleged aim of these changes was to remove the stigma of rape from the victim by emphasizing the violent, rather than sexual, nature of the crime.

The existing law has a maximum sentence of life for conviction of rape and a maximum ten year sentence for attempted rape.

It also has an interesting anomaly. Indecent assault of a female carries a sentence of five years, while indecent assault of a male has a sentence of ten years.

While the proposed changes in the rape law are important, especially in view of the low conviction rate (54% for rape as compared to 86% for other indictable offences) several areas of the new law are inadequate.

Objections to the proposed law stem from what many see as "loop-holes".

Objections to the proposed law stem from what many see as "loop-holes". While most agree that assault is the correct term to use, many see the term "indecent assault" as an attempt to legislate morality. Others fear the wording used to differentiate between Aggravated Indecent Assault and Indecent Assault, will make it difficult to convict a person of Aggravated Indecent Assault.

The proposed legislation also retains the Spousal Immunity section. A husband cannot be charged with raping his wife, unless they are living apart at the time. The husband can only be charged with common assault at present.

The working paper of the Law Reform Commission recommends that the present offences be repealed and replaced with one offence of Sexual Assault which would apply to male and female victims equally.

Other people would like to see the legislation based on the degree of violence and sexual contact.

In 1975 the Criminal Code was amended to prevent a woman's past sexual experiences from being examined at a trial without the judge's permission. Some groups want this section to include an amendment requiring that the judge give his reasons for the decision.

While by no means perfect, time will be needed to assess the impact of the proposed laws. The attitude that an "unchaste" woman does not really need the protection of the law will take some time to die.

This is borne out by the section of the Criminal Code regarding Sexual Harassment on the job. It prohibits sexual intercourse with a female employee under 21 and of previously chaste character. It's offensive enough to give any 22 year old feminist heartburn!

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a problem that has existed for years and is something that has to be tolerated by many working women.

Sexual harassment can be defined simply as unsolicited attention in the form of visual, verbal and/or physical sexual overtures.

It can consist of any or all of: constant brushing against a person's body; continually leering and ogling of a person's body; squeezing or pinching a person's body; catching a person alone for forced sexual intimacies; an outright sexual proposition backed by the threat of losing marks or a job; forced sexual relations.

It can result in financial, psychological or physical harm for the victims whose complaints include symptoms such as long-term anxiety, strain, tension and nervous exhaustion.

Unwelcome sexual advances are nothing new. Female secretaries have tolerated the advances and propositions of male bosses for years, likewise waitresses have had their rears pinched or lost tips or their jobs.

What distinguishes sexual harassment from friendly sexual interchange is coercion. The issue revolves around the notion of consent — if a woman must comply with her boss's sexual advances to keep her job, she is effectively denied a choice, and cannot be said to be consenting freely.

The threat is not violence, but it can be salary cuts, poor evaluations, disciplinary layoffs, threats of demotion or discharge.

Power is the weapon which sexual harassers have in common. The university professor who offers a student better marks in exchange for sex is just as guilty as the executive boss — both are using the power they hold as a sexual threat.

A questionnaire distributed by *Redbook* was answered by 9,000 women, 88% of whom had experienced sexual harassment on the job. In the U.S., several lawsuits charging discrimination until Title VII of the Civil Rights Act have been filed. However, it is the exception and not the rule when a woman speaks out on her experiences, let alone files any kind of suit.

The need for women to share their experiences is as important as the need for them to speak out. Many women feel guilty because co-workers or bosses tell them that the sexual overtures occurred in their own imagination or were of their own making.

Women's groups hope that widespread discussion of sexual harassment will educate the public to the true nature of the problem and will encourage victims to seek help, speaking out instead of accepting unwanted attentions as "part of the job."

## Help for battered women

# WIN House opens

by **Margaret Donovan**

You've had enough. You're in your twenties, new to the city, with a couple of children. You also have a husband that beats you, and you decided to leave.

Two months ago, you would probably have gone or been sent to the YWCA or the Overnight Shelter for Women. While adequate, neither are ideal for these particular problems.

WIN House (Women In Need) opened in December 1978, specifically for battered mothers and their children. Since then they have helped about 39 women and nearly 80 children.

The maximum period that a woman can stay at the house is three weeks. During this time the women get moral and emotional support from the staff and volunteers, and decide what they are going to do. Some women are also being referred to agencies in the city for counselling, legal help and aid in finding a place to live, depending upon their particular needs.

The chief problem for many of the women is money. If they decide to live on their own, they may have to get a job and find suitable accommodation. Some women are new to the city and have no immediate family or close friends who can help make the transition to independence easier. In such cases, WIN house

provides a volunteer contact for the women for as long as she needs it.

The women who have used the services of WIN House have ranged in age from 18-44 years, with children from 4 weeks to 15 years, and are from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Many women come from families in which violence was common. Ruth Pinkney, Manager of WIN House, sees this as an extension of our generally violent culture, that is often depicted on T.V. film and in literature.

She also says that the battered wife syndrome is usually the tip of severe family problems. Husbands may be immature and under stress because of work, money or booze. Wives may be passive and submissive, which aggravates the problem.

Part of the situation arises when men are not allowed to react to stress in their lives, the same way as women are. Violence and anger are seen as the male way of coping when things go wrong. However, Ruth Pinkney does not think the present attitudes towards sex role stereotyping, that encourage boys to be more emotional, will bring an end to the problem.

The need for a temporary crisis shelter in Edmonton for mothers and their children, was

first identified over eight years ago. The Clifford Lee Foundation by renting the premises to WIN House for \$1 a year allowed the project to get going.

Community support from individuals and groups has been excellent, with people giving money, time, toys, food and clothing. In addition, the provincial government pays \$5.50 per day, per person, towards the \$30 per day, per person operating costs.

At present the 7 staff and 30 volunteers are all female. Ruth Pinkney would like to see men involved both as staff and volunteers in the future. She says it is important for the women and the children not to see men in a totally negative light.

The children at WIN House, while often the most tragic part of the problem, also provide the house with its lighter moments, and help prevent a gloomy, hopeless atmosphere from setting in.

As long as men and women live together, physical abuse to one person by the other will probably continue. As gloomy as the statement sounds, so far, none of the women WIN House has helped have returned.

Edmonton has the dubious distinction of being one of the last large Canadian cities to have such a shelter. It was long overdue.