

# rape...



by Trish Wells  
reprinted from  
The Cord Weekly  
Dal Photo / Mooney

Rape as a crime is certainly not new. It has been around at least since biblical times and has been an inevitable and acceptable part of such social events as wars, football weekends and (often) marriage.

What is new is that women—the most usual victims of the crime—are no longer willing to lie back and take it.

For the first time in history, we are hearing about the problem of rape from the woman's point of view.

This is new because our attitudes about rape have generally been shaped by seeing it through the eyes of men—the men who 'owned' the women who were raped, and the men who saw nothing wrong in raping women.

This is why we generally have more sympathy for the husband or boyfriend of a rape victim (when, for instance, he leaves her or is embarrassed to be seen with her) than we do for the victim herself.

It is why we tend to be skeptical of the woman who reports she was raped by her date ("But men have such uncontrollable passions... You must have led him on...").

It is why we tend to look at rape as, at worst, a sexual 'misdemeanour' and we look at the rapist as a 'bad salesman', an innocent and clumsy victim of the social system that says all women want it, but they might pretend they don't, so you must break down their resistance by gentle persistence. If she's stubborn, keep insisting...

All these attitudes add up to why most women don't report rape, and

why if a victim does complain, she either won't be believed from the start or a jury will decide she is the guilty party and let her attacker go free!

As the result of these attitudes, she must suffer for her sins, by enduring snide remarks from friends, jokes about rape from strangers, anger and recrimination from family and, at the very least, nagging destructive questions in her own mind: Was it really my own fault? Maybe I was stupid to go out with him, maybe I shouldn't have been in that place at that time, maybe I did lead him on.

No wonder that at least 9 out of 10 sexual crimes are never reported at all, not even to the victim's family or closest friends.

So nobody really knows how often rapes happen. But we do know, from the scant statistics that are available, that rape can happen to any woman—3-month-old babies have been raped, 85-year-old grandmothers have been raped, poor women, middle-class women, 'nice girls', prostitutes, women wearing bathing suits at the beach or parkas and workboots in the dead of winter, walking through a parking lot.

In the words of a convicted rapist: "I would just drive around until I saw a woman alone. I didn't care what she looked like—she didn't have to be attractive or slim. All she had to be was alone".

This seems to fit our image of rape—a demented stranger leaping out of the bushes or from some dark alley at the unsuspecting victim. If

this was a true image, it would be relatively easy to clear up the problem of rape—just make sure such areas are better policed, or advise women to avoid them.

Unfortunately, rape doesn't usually happen like that. Most rapists are described by their psychiatrists as "perfectly normal men in most respects, except for a greater tendency toward violence".

More than 50 per cent of rapists are known by their victims, and most rapes don't happen in the street, they happen in the victim's own home or in the home of the rapist.

This figure would probably jump drastically if we knew how many children are raped by family members (brothers, brother-in-law, fathers, stepfathers, uncles) or by neighbours, and if we could find out how many women are raped, often regularly by their husbands.

But, in the first instance, this type of sexual attack (molesting of children by family) is often ignored or kept under wraps for fear of scandal, and in the second case, the law says that a woman cannot be 'raped' by her husband (for the law also says that a husband has unlimited sexual rights to his wife. In fact, even if they are no longer living together, but are not yet divorced, a man may still rape his wife with no fear of punishment—the courts look at such an attack as an 'attempt at reconciliation' and the law must not interfere with such attempts.)

It is not likely that we will ever hear about all the family rapes that