Organizing Against Silence

By Michelle Lalonde
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TORONTO (CUP) — Women in downtown Toronto neigh-b bourhoods are organizing against silence surrounding sexual violence against women.

Following five rapes in the Annex neighbourhood near the University of Toronto, committed systematically by the same man during a two-month period, women are blaming local media and police for not informing them about the rapist.

"We don't want stories that focus on the victim, what she did, what she wore, what she looked like, and we don't want rape reports buried in the back of the paper," said Nora Currie of Women Against Violence Against Women.

"We want information on or near the front page."

A public meeting in early October attracted more than 150 women, many of whom expressed anger and betrayal about the silence concerning the serial rapes.

A letter written by the fifth victim of the Annex rapes, and addressed to feminist Globe and Mail columnist June Callwood, was read aloud during the meeting.

"Four weeks ago, as I slept in my bed, my doors locked, a hooded man forced his way into my apartment, my bed, and myself," the woman wrote.

"The man who raped me has raped four other women in a six-block radius in the last two months. He follows his prey like a hunter. He attacks single women, living alone in second or third floor apartments. He always enters through the balcony," she wrote.

"Why wasn't I made aware (before) that my life was in danger?"

The woman also said she was told by police not to speak with the rapist's other victims or to try to warn women because it would hinder police investigation.

Police were invited to the meeting, but no representatives attended. Organizers said the no-show is indicative of their priorities.

Ann Keown, who organized a similar meeting during the summer, warns women of police attitudes.

"The police did show up at our meeting. We asked them what a woman would do if she is sexually assaulted. Should she struggle?" said Keown.

"The answer was, 'Do you want to lose your life just to prevent someone from getting a couple of minutes of pleasure'."

Murray Colwing, an inspector of the 52nd Division of the Metro Toronto Police, said police did not attend the October meeting because they had only received the invitation that day.

"I consider that too short notice for a topical issue like rape. I wouldn't want to send someone down there who didn't know what they were talking about," said Cowling.

Valerie Scott of the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes says rapes could be prevented through the information network shared by prostitutes if they were not silenced by police and stigmatized by the public.

"It's just another example o of how society divides women to make them powerless," said Scott, adding Bill C-49 prevents prostitutes from communicating with each other, the media, and police.

"We know who these guys are. We have their license plates, we've seen their faces," said Scott. "Women need to network, and to start acting for themselves."

Barbara Hall, alderwoman and member of the Metro Action Committee Against Violence Against Women, said women shouldn't have to "lock themselves into their houses" to be safe.

"Women must look at active ways to stop violence. Organize more meetings like this, take self defence courses, talk to and meet other women in your neighbourhoods, and demand better lighting and better public transportation from your municipal politicians," said Hall.

women at the meeting signed a petition to mayor Art Eggleton calling for funding for free self-defence courses, and full daycare subsidies for mothers who attend the course.

Said Keown, "it is insulting when police say to us, 'We didn't tell you there was a rapist in your neighbourhood because the women would panic and become hysterical.'

"Information is power, information allows us to make choices about whether to lock our doors and where to walk at night," said Keown.

Children's Career Choices

OTTAWA ... According to some of today's children, women can't be forest rangers because they can't run away from fires in high-heeled shoes and men can't be nurses because they don't wear dresses.

These were some of the answers given by children in a study of career choices, entitled "When I Grow Up ...", released today by the Women's Bureau of Labour Canada.

Questionnaires were administered to over 700 children, ranging from six to 14 years of age, in 12 schools across the country, in order to discover how elementary school children view their future worklife.

The answers of the younger children sometimes provided a spot of humour, say the authors, as in the case of a little girl who wished to be a bus driver or the Queen. Also some little boys in Baie-Comeau intend to become Prime Minister.

In spite of these light touches, however, the report provides valuable insight into a serious topic that has seldom been researched in Canada. The study examines whether children's views of their future careers are shaped by traditional female/male stereotypes.

It is hoped that if children can perceive wider and less stereotyped views of men and women at work, they may be less likely as adults to practise discrimination in hiring and supervision, and may be less likely to restrict their own career choices.

The results of the study confirm the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotyping in Canadian society.

The study found that while attitudes have changed to the extent that boys and girls stated that many occupations could be undertaken by either men or women, this was not reflected in what children thought they would be doing when they grew up. Many girls seemed to be saying "Yes, women can become doctors, but I expect to be a nurse," notes the report.

Interestingly, the girls' views of sex stereotyped activities were not influenced by whether or not their mothers worked outside the home.

The authors, Dormer Ellis and Lyz Saywer, conclude that greater efforts in education are needed to make children aware of the whole range of job options that will be open to them in the future.

The publication will be extensively distributed to guidance counsellors, schools, teachers' associations, teachers' associations, education faculties and teachers' colleges, as well as to the media and the public. The questionnaire administered to the children is included in the Appendix, so that parents and educators can use it to initiate discussions with children about career choices.

A Little Harassment Can't Hurt — Can It?

TORONTO (CUP) — Faculty at the University of Toronto want their policy on sexual harassment to distinguish between "serious" and "mild" forms of harassment.

Students and staff have opposed the U of T Faculty Association's definition of "repeated or extreme" harassment as conditions for filing a grievance.

According to Henry Rogers, UTFA's chief negotiator for the sexual harassment policy, the words 'repeated and extreme' were added to "distinguish very mild things from more serious things."

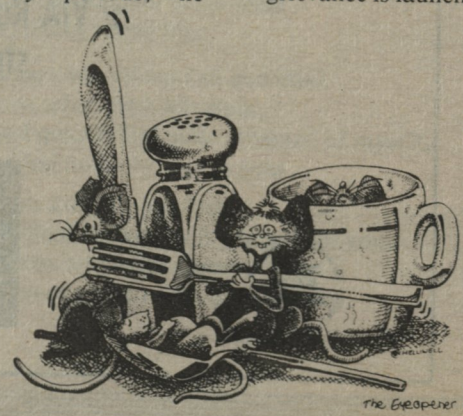
"They were not intended to make it easier or harder to make a complaint," he said.

But student representatives argue that the clause is intimidating and unnecessary.

"If students are faced with a policy that suggest that harassment may not be as important — as 'extreme' as they think — they may never feel confident enough to report it," said Brian Burchell, a student council representative of U of T's Board of Governors.

The faculty association has also requested that all complaints be filed within six months of an incident.

"The longer you wait," said Rogers, "the more you give up the notion of prevention." Longer delay periods, he added, also reduce the chance to gather solid evidence.

But, said Burchell, "it is reasonable to suggest that students would be very reluctant to launch a complaint against an instructor while they exist in a grade relationship with that given instructor."

Rogers said the university has provisions that prevent an instructor from marking a complainant's work after a grievance is launched.