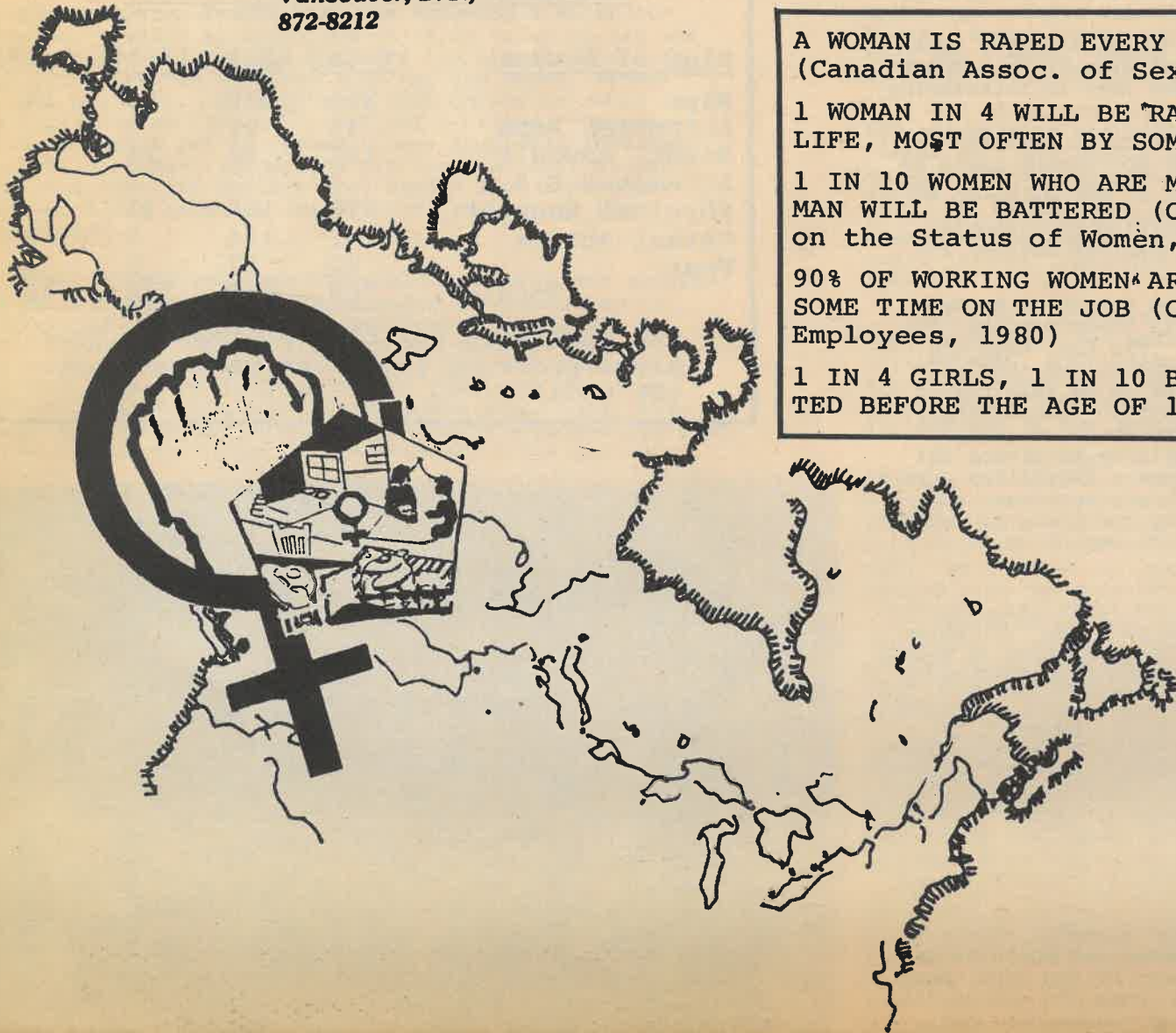


The Rape Relief Files 1987

**Vancouver Rape Relief
& Women's Shelter**

77 E. 20th Avenue,
Vancouver, B.C., V5V 1L7
872-8212

25¢



A WOMAN IS RAPED EVERY 17 MINUTES IN CANADA
(Canadian Assoc. of Sexual Assault Centres, 1981)

1 WOMAN IN 4 WILL BE RAPED AT SOME TIME IN HER
LIFE, MOST OFTEN BY SOMEONE SHE KNOWS (CASAC)

1 IN 10 WOMEN WHO ARE MARRIED OR LIVING WITH A
MAN WILL BE BATTERED (Canadian Advisory Council
on the Status of Women, 1978)

90% OF WORKING WOMEN ARE SEXUALLY HARASSED AT
SOME TIME ON THE JOB (Canadian Union of Public
Employees, 1980)

1 IN 4 GIRLS, 1 IN 10 BOYS, ARE SEXUALLY ASSAUL-
TED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 YEARS (United Way, 1984)

One woman + one woman...

VANCOUVER RAPE RELIEF Total Sexual Assault Calls

1974 - 112	1978 - 398	1982 - 630
1975 - 185	1979 - 475	1983 - 652
1976 - 300	1980 - 500	1984 - 705
1977 - 314	1981 - 600	1985 - 778

In 1986, we began counting each incident we were told about, a slightly larger number than total calls -- 994 in 1986, and 1200 in 1987.

Rape, battery, the sexual abuse of women and children are highly visible realities...we experience them in our own lives, and they are the topic of daily conversation. They are analysed by professionals and reported in the media.

If we stop and think, we realise that none of this was true even 20 years ago. Rape, battering and sexual abuse certainly existed ... but they were not talked about, analysed or reported on ... and so, in the way that realities become widely known as truth, they were not true. A very large part of women's experience was invisible.

The anti-rape movement started in North America in the early 1970s, and Vancouver Rape Relief was one of the first crisis lines. Like the other early rape crisis centres, we started out with two women advertising a telephone number that other women could call. In 1974 they got 112 calls

Vancouver City Police received 490 sexual assault complaints that they considered "founded" and laid charges in 155 of these cases. In 1986, 400 sexual offenses were reported to them.

Over the years about 1% of all sexual assaults are estimated to finally result in a conviction.

About 20% of the women who called us this year also reported to the police -- slightly higher than the 15% average of previous years.

from women telling about their own sexual assaults. By 1980, this grew to 500 calls. Last year, 1987, this single rape crisis line received 833 crisis calls, in which women reported 1200 separate attacks by a man or men on a woman or child.

Over the same decade and a half, the battered women's movement has arisen from a similar beginning. The earliest houses opened out of the willingness of a handful of women to get together and let it be known that there was a safe place for women to come to escape battering husbands.

From a time when violence against women was invisible it is now sometimes talked about in the alarmist terms of the tabloid as a "growing epidemic" of modern society. Those of us who daily work to combat this violence against us do not make this claim. We don't know whether there is more violence than in the past. We do know that we have together made it visible... "we" being every woman who has ever picked up a phone to tell, and every woman who has ever answered such a call and listened.

The powerful accumulative effect of all this woman-to-woman talking gives authentic voice to the common experience of women. One tool by which we can document the truth of that experience is with statistics. Most rape crisis centres, transition houses keep statistics, as do police, social agencies and hospitals. Added all together, it is estimated they measure about one tenth of the assaults that actually take place.

The kind and nature of the attacks against us vary. In 1981, Vancouver Rape Relief opened a women's shelter, in order to work more effectively with the needs expressed by the women who call us. We became one of a half dozen such transition houses in the Lower Mainland. Rape crisis centres, transition houses, women's health centres and women's centres also share some common organising history as the direct feminist services of women's liberation.

The common thread in all our experience of sexual and sexist violence is that men do it...and they do it to women, or women and children. When we recognised how common this simple fact really was, we knew we weren't crazy. It is men who have to change their behaviour. We don't try to psychoanalyse ourselves or describe the behaviour or characteristics of victims. What these statistics reveal is male behaviour, and in a very limited way, its effect on us.

Statistics are a limited tool, and in releasing those of this one organisation at year-end, we cannot tell you everything we know or believe. Neither are we Statistics Canada. We don't just count bodies. We collect and analyse in order to organise and fight violence against women.

Women call us not just to report, but because they want something from us. It may be just a comforting word, or it may be the advice and wisdom of our accumulated experience, or it may be an advocate or ally in a fight they want to wage. They have come to expect from feminist organisations such as ours that their confidentiality will be respected.

(continued inside ...)

What can 1 Year's Statistics Tell Us About the Violence Men Do To Us?

That there is a lot of violence done against us -- that the experience of that violence is common to many of us, and that the fear of this knowledge permeates the lives of many women.

Five percent of the crisis calls we get are from women who are not reporting a specific, actual assault or a specific man, but whose level of generalised fear is interfering with how they live their lives.

For example, we hear from women who go to extreme lengths to avoid leaving their homes or who cannot sleep as a result of knowing that the world is a dangerous place and not having ways to tamper down the fear. Often this is triggered by media reports or other learning that should work to educate women to better arm themselves against the violence.

We understand sexist violence to be a kind of bottom line mechanism of control that keeps all women somewhat "in their place" simply because it exists. The fact that one man attacks one woman multiplied many times, and that all the rest of us know some men are willing to do this and it will happen to some of us, is very powerful. Increasingly, we learn it could be any woman, although there are many factors which can increase our vulnerability to attack (if we live alone, are poor, old, young, have a disability, are immigrant or native). There are sensible precautions and alerts we can act on without restricting our lives too much, but there is no guarantee of immunity for any of us.

* * * *

As a result of criticism coming from feminists, the old definition and evidence necessary to prove "rape" no longer appears in the criminal code. It has been replaced by a new law making sexual assault a crime of violence against another person.

We at Rape Relief have found it useful, however, to reveal the number of rapes reported to us as a separate fact not buried in the total of sexual assaults. This is because we know the word continues to hold very powerful meaning for us and for all women -- rape still exists no matter what we call it. It is the ultimate act of male power over women and will remain so until we have achieved significant liberation from all forms of patriarchal control. Rape will end when men stop raping.

As the ultimate act of "possessing" a woman, rape accounted for 34% of all assaults on women and children in 1987. We are always saddened and angered by how many rapes are committed on children less than 13 years old (about 30% of attacks on this age group, in our experience over the years). This year's total seems particularly high, at 41%, but it's accuracy can be questioned given that we do not receive a high percentage of calls about child victims in this age group. Most of our knowledge of the nature of child sexual abuse and incest has come from the reporting of adult women of experiences they had in the past, and so is not reflected in the 1987 figures.

* * * *

In the last four years, we have sheltered nearly 400 women and children in our transition house. A recent national survey of 98 similar houses, "Battered, But Not Beaten", reports:

"...separation and even divorce do not protect women from violence. Jean Giles-Sims reports: 'Of those who never returned to the man after they left the shelter, 44% reported at least one violent incident with the man...Physical distance, separate residences, and legal restraining orders did little to prevent violence.'"

"In the majority of the cases, violence was not a new occurrence. Fifty-nine percent of the women had previously left their partners because of violence. Seventy-six percent of these women had left because of physical or emotional battering, 5% because they were sexually assaulted by their husbands, 4% because of financial abuse, 11% because of the physical or emotional abuse of their children, and 3% because of the sexual abuse of their children.

This same collection of men who are, or who have been, in a sexual relationship with a woman account for 47% of the verbal attacks we hear about, and 24% of the rapes. Women staying at our shelter have taught us that men who are repeatedly violent to the women they live with usually regularly force sex on them as well.

* * * *

For young women between the ages of 14 and 18 years, 33% of the assaults come from family members (16% from fathers); 25% from casual acquaintances and 24% from strangers. Although we, and laws against child sexual abuse, see these victims as children -- the men who attack them often don't. J. Bob Carter, a prominent B.C. businessman, was convicted of indecent assault, and not child abuse, for buying two 14 year old girls. In this case, the criminal justice system didn't "see" the children either.

For girls 13 and under, fathers alone account for 25% of the men who assault them; other family members and friends for 22%; casual acquaintances for 19% and strangers for 19%. We are not the most common place that concerned adults call to report a child presently in danger, as it is required by law to report to social services. Most of what we have learned about child sexual assault and incest is from the recollections of adult women who are still grappling with the implications of this in their lives.

VANCOUVER RAPE RELIEF AND WOMEN'S SHELTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE REPORTS - 1987

Kind of Attack	Total	Adult	14-18	0-13
Rape	251	170	62	19
Attempted Rape	46	41	5	-
Sexual Assault	102	54	24	24
Attempted S.A.	3	2	1	-
Physical Assault	176	165	11	-
Verbal Attack	151	144	5	2
Fear	40	37	2	1
Totals	769	613	110	46

** The remaining 431 of 1200 reports took place prior to 1987, the year we took the call.



For all ages, it is men we know who are the most dangerous to us -- the variations in relationship to attacker follow logically from the variety of men who have access to women or children, and from the opportunities that arise from that access, and from the relative difference in power between them. And for all ages of women and children, it is not the streets and parks of our communities that are the most dangerous places -- these account for about 17% of the places we are attacked... "her home", "his home", "their home" combined account for 65% of the places we are attacked for all categories of attack and ages of victim combined.

Although strangers account for a decided minority of all attacks on women and children, they do account for the largest single category (38%) in attempted rapes and sexual assaults. It follows that the men who have the least relationship and direct power over our lives are the least successful in carrying out their plan to violate us. This is of course, far less true for children, given that adults have proportionately more power over them regardless of the relationship.

The number of times women resist, escape, thwart or pay back the man who attacked us cannot mostly be revealed in an article on statistics. Revealing the truth about the violence done to us is 1 step in fighting it, in ending it. But individual women tell us every day of their bravery and brilliance in fighting abuse in their own lives. And we are well aware that our own work, and all the effort of women everywhere who organise together to end it is a much more exciting story than a statistician can tell!

Diana

OUR BODIES, OUR CHOICES

Prime Minister Vander Zalm has launched a major attack on our freedom as women and it is up to us to act now to keep our ground. On the heels of the Supreme Court decision which removed abortion from the law books, Vander Zalm made his move. He announced that abortions would not be publicly funded like other medical services. Overnight B.C. women lost a lot of ground - some hospitals that were performing abortions (under the old restrictions) stopped, or insisted that two doctors must agree; some sent women off to the U.S.; some are insisting on payment up front for abortions.

Then, the Socreds bowed to public pressure and announced that rape and incest victims would be granted an exception - they could apply for criminal compensation to pay for their abortions. A ridiculous gesture because, as we know, over 60% of women who are raped do not report the attack to police (a condition of receiving Criminal Compensation in B.C.), and because women would still have to come up with the money at the time they need the abortion (it can take up to a year to win criminal compensation).

bands and fathers who refuse to "allow" them to seek abortions. Women report men who force them to have abortions they don't want. Women report men who cause miscarriages by their violence to a pregnant woman.

For all these reasons, we are painfully aware that the struggle to end violence against women is closely linked to the struggle for reproductive freedom for women. We must control our own bodies, we must have the power to decide when and how to birth children, when and with whom we freely share our sexuality. Women still do not have these choices consistently - especially if we are young, poor, native, immigrant or live outside of large urban centres.

In order to resist this most recent attack on women we must make sure that women do have access to free, safe abortions now. If we take this ground now, we will be much stronger (women will rally to support a direct action that allows women a measure of freedom) to wage the longer fight for control of our bodies and of our lives.

We are members of the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics which is planning to set up reproductive health centres (including abortion services) for women in B.C., starting with Vancouver, in early 1988. We want to have reproductive health centres as opposed to abortion clinics only, so that we can address the whole range of issues connected with our reproductive health.

Abortion is only one of the choices women need to have available to ensure control over our bodies. We need safe, effective birth control, we need men to take equal responsibility with us for birth control and for raising children. Universally accessible daycare is an essential service.

We have to be very clear that when we say we're fighting for safe, accessible abortions and birth control that we are not advocating what has been called "population control" in the U.S., also sometimes termed "birth control". We are fighting for women's liberation, for the means of control to be in our hands. In the 60's and 70's hundreds of thousands of women in the U.S. and in Canada were subjected to forced sterilization. Mostly these women were poor, black or native women - in Puerto Rico 35% of the women were sterilized. In Love, Saskatchewan, in 1980, women were threatened with losing their welfare check if they had another child. Native women have been sterilized without consent and frequently without their knowledge. In these situations the state ripped off women's bodies because it cost them less (one of Vander Zalm's arguments for not funding abortions) - this was their solution to poverty, rather than addressing its cause.

Similarly, we now have the controversy around the question of "surrogate motherhood". The term "surrogate" tells the whole story. A woman who carries a pregnancy to term is a mother and she should have all the choices about whether she will keep the child (this means among other considerations, the financial ability to do that) or give it up or get money for the labour of her pregnancy.

We are hearing of women being offered contracts that leave them no room to change their minds about giving up the baby, and also only pay for the "goods" - a healthy baby - nothing for the labour of bringing the baby to term, nothing, if the baby is born with any problems. The debate is being posed as "should surrogate motherhood be legalized, or outlawed?" - in both cases what is being proposed is government regulation of our fertility. Our fertility is not a thing separate from the rest of us and the power to decide about it should be in women's hands, no one else's.

The women's liberation movement has always been described in terms of the number of choices available to a woman. Our movement has been a fight to remove the obstacles in the way of women living our lives to the fullest according to each woman's definition of what that means. Men as individuals and as a group have thrown up obstacles - socially, economically, legally - that prevent us from having the choices we need to have full control over our lives. When we have succeeded in overthrowing those obstacles, we have expanded our vision of what we can do. For example, because we do have more access to birth control than women did the past (women went to jail for promoting it), we can afford to want sex for our own satisfaction as well as to make babies. Traditionally, our sexuality has been advertised as a service or fringe benefit that is a man's birthright. We are now saying that we own our sexuality - including being the initiator of sex, masturbating to our heart's content and lesbianism. But the attacks keep coming. Men do use rape as a way to enact sexual ownership. Lesbians and gays are still severely punished, and the anti-choicers are vocally anti-sex (for women) except for the purpose of procreation.

At Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter, our collective has decided we have a responsibility to get in the fight this year and win the right for every woman to choose abortion. Vander Zalm's particular attack has far reaching implications. We encourage all women to take an active stand this year because if he wins on this, we will not only lose this particular choice - it will be that much harder to defend our freedom to act in any area of our lives.

Nicole



TRIBUNAL

Jh h m

Unless we fight hard we could lose much of the ground we won before the Supreme Court decision. Survey have told us that 85% of B.C. are in favour of a woman's right to choose an abortion. Abortion must be available as a choice to every woman. It is her decision - not after the cops approve it (in the case of rape and incest) or after the social workers approve (in the case of "wards of the state"), or a male controlled medical board allows it.

It is true that 5% of women who are raped get pregnant as a result. Rape crisis centre workers have made this point for years when we have fought for women's right to choose abortion - however it is an argument for why all women must have this choice. We have always acted on the principle that women must have control over who we tell about the attack on us (because of the prevailing mythology about rape which blames women for provoking it or deserving it) - in other words - confidentiality. Being forced to account to anyone else about this decision is another violation - or as the text of the Supreme Court decision describes it, "an interference with a woman's body...and her right to security of person".

As rape crisis centre workers we are fighting for freedom from rape, incest, sexual harassment. We know that unless we are free of these attacks and free of the fear of being violently attacked by men, we will never be in a position to take equal power with men. This is one of the struggles we have to win. Control over our bodies, particularly our reproductivity and sexuality is another.

Women staying in our shelter report husbands and lovers who take no responsibility for birth control, for their own or other's health, for the children who are born into this world. Women report men who try to keep them pregnant in order to increase control. Women report hus

