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British Columbia

Rape questionnaires rapped

By SUZANNE FOURNIER

The name and method used by an accused *rapist* aren't important, but the B.C. government does want to know the race, occupation and previous sexual assault history of the rape *victim*.

That's what B.C.'s five rape crisis centres are reading into two questionnaires which the B.C. government is demanding they answer before they receive their annual \$151,000 grant.

The Coalition of B.C. Rape Centres has only one objection to one of the questionnaires, but calls the other "insulting and dangerous."

In a letter to the B.C. government, Vancouver Rape Relief worker Bonnie Agnew says the centres aren't opposed to continuing to provide frequent financial and research reports, as well as the audits performed by the auditor-general's office.

But she adds: "We have been extremely clear since 1977 in all negotiations with the government

Victim data 'insulting'

that our confidential client records are not for sale."

None of the pertinent details of sexual assault, such as identifiable patterns, weapons used, locations, or even descriptions of the accused rapist, are requested by the government, Agnew points out.

But one question does ask: "Can you identify what characteristics distinguish between single vs. multiple contact victims?"

Says Agnew's co-worker Lee Lakeman: "The whole focus of the questions is to study the victim so we'll know more about how she got herself attacked.

"The questionnaires lead to profiles of rape victims, not information on how to stop rape."

For the three ministries involved — health, human resources, and the attorney general's office — demographic data on the victim is the first priority: Age, race, occu-

pation, education and whether the victim has been "previously assaulted by the same or a different assailant."

"We know that one woman out of four will be raped at some point in her life, we know a woman is raped in Canada every 17 minutes, and 65 to 70 per cent of rapes are casual acquaintance rapes, at his place, or hers, or in his car," says Agnew.

Those statistics haven't been requested by the government but are provided in the hundreds of speaking engagements rape crisis workers fulfil each year, Agnew says.

"Instead, these three ministries want profiles of rape victims," she said.

And some of the questions are insulting, Rape Relief workers say. "Victim requests assistance in going to the hospital but is dissuaded" — workers are expected to answer yes or no.

The 10 paid coalition workers, who make \$970 per month, provide a 24-hour crisis telephone line, referrals to medical and legal professionals and counselling with groups and individuals at the Vancouver Rape Relief centre.

The coalition assisted 3,000 women last year in B.C. and in Vancouver alone, it received more than 600 crisis calls.

Calls from women who have been raped and chose to confide in a rape relief worker have poured into the centres, Agnew said.

But these women are concerned that information they gave in confidence will be surrendered to a government official, and they aren't reassured by a government suggestion that their names be blacked out.

In a small centre such as Terrace, and even in Vancouver, revealing the circumstances and details such as weapon or location of a sexual assault can identify a rape victim, Agnew points out.