

# DALLAS MORNING NEWS

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By Eric Aasen

## ***Dallas Area Rapes Up by 60% in 2003, Police Say Increase Could be Result of More Victims Coming Forward***

The number of reported rapes in Irving jumped nearly 60 percent in 2003, which police say may be the result of victims feeling more comfortable in reporting the crime.

Most victims were raped by people they knew, police said. Therefore, officials don't believe a serial rapist is behind the surge.

And statistics don't show that rapes are more likely to occur in certain parts of the city.

In 2003, 75 rapes were reported, compared with 47 rapes in 2002 - a 59.6 percent increase, the biggest jump in at least 13 years. It's the greatest rape tally since 1990, when 91 were recorded.

Police and domestic violence observers are encouraged that more people are coming forward to report the crime. They believe that victims are more aware of the importance of filing police reports.

But the Police Department doesn't plan on beefing up efforts to combat the crimes because officials haven't been able to pinpoint a reason for the increase, said Officer David Tull, police spokesman.

The department has an ongoing effort of informing schools, neighborhood watch groups and businesses about a variety of crimes, he said.

Despite the increase in rapes, the overall crime rate in Irving went up only 0.58 percent in 2003. Fewer burglaries and vehicle thefts were reported last year, but the city saw increases in reports of homicides, robberies, aggravated assaults and thefts.

Statistics don't point to a trend of more rapes being reported in Irving over time. Rape report rates have fluctuated over the last decade.

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In Irving, fewer than 10 percent of victims were raped by strangers, Officer Tull estimated. Most were assaulted by an acquaintance - a friend, significant other or family member, he said.

Irving statistics fall in line with a recent state study, which shows that about 20 percent of female victims were sexually assaulted by a stranger. Women are far more likely to be assaulted, according to the study, released last year by the University of Texas School of Social Work. It was the first statewide survey on sexual assault.

Only 18 percent of victims report their assault to law enforcement, the study said.

Residents are becoming more aware of the importance of filing a report with police, which may have fueled an increase in reports in Irving, Officer Tull said.

“Something’s working well where people are more comfortable and not intimidated to report it, which is good,” he said.

But the increase could simply mean that more rapes are taking place in Irving, said Jana Barker, executive director of Brighter Tomorrows, a shelter in Irving for domestic violence victims.

It could also be attributed to a more educated public and media coverage on rapes, she said.

An ongoing statewide public awareness campaign may also be helping, she said. The Texas Association Against Sexual Assault launched an effort last year that raised awareness on the importance of speaking up about the crime.

In the past, victims were more likely to keep quiet about the crime, Ms. Barker said. That’s no longer the case. More sexual assault victims are seeking counseling from Brighter Tomorrows, which also has shelters in Grand Prairie and DeSoto.

The agency has seen about a 200 percent increase over three years in people seeking help - from 98 people in 2001 to 300 last year, she said.

While Brighter Tomorrows encourages sexual assault victims to report the crime, and while there’s more awareness about talking with police, many still don’t want to admit what happened, Ms. Barker said.

Rape victims have been traumatized, she said, and some feel that they’ll relive the experience if they talk with police.

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