

## **Etobicoke Rape A Lie, Police Say**

**Police spent hours this weekend searching for two men who hijacked a woman's car in her Etobicoke neighbourhood, sexually assaulted her and drove away, dumping her in front of her home.**

By National Post March 4, 2008

Police spent hours this weekend searching for two men who hijacked a woman's car in her Etobicoke neighbourhood, sexually assaulted her and drove away, dumping her in front of her home.

The woman told police she was abducted at gunpoint, forced into a dark green van, driven to an unknown location and sexually assaulted.

Her car was found abandoned at Woodbine Raceway, but officers were unable to find any sign of the two suspects.

They soon concluded the unidentified woman made up the whole story.

Detective Candice Flis, of the Toronto police sex crimes unit, would not discuss the specifics of the case, but said that such false allegations are rare.

"When people make up things like this, generally there's something else going on in their lives -- some sort of crisis," she said. "They feel that the only way out of whatever pressure they're under is to make up these stories."

In January, the sex-crimes unit had to deal with another false sexual assault allegation, a York University student who claimed to have been attacked in the stairwell of a university residence. Student groups charged the university was not doing enough to protect students, but police soon determined the allegation was unfounded.

When such false stories do come up, Det. Flis said it is usually not too difficult for trained investigators to spot them. "When certain things don't add up, we start to ask questions," she said.

"The stories don't quite sound right: All the points just don't quite connect. So you just go into more and more detail: asking all the detailed questions. That's when the stories come apart."

Police usually do not lay charges in such cases and do not identify the women who make up the stories.

Cheryl Regehr, a professor of social work at the University of Toronto, said that only makes sense, because such fabrications are almost always "a call for help in many cases."

While she said false rape charges are "exceedingly rare," they usually draw a disproportionate amount of publicity.

"They become highly sensationalized and highly publicized, because they're so rare," said Prof. Regehr. "And usually they're pretty lurid stories."

But the effect they can have on real victims of sexual assault can be chilling, she said. "Since the dawn of time there's been this urban myth about how women make up rapes," she said.

"Every time a case like this comes out, it feeds that ? and it really dissuades the real victims from disclosing."

She said sexual assault is the least reported major crime, because women -- who are almost always the victims -- are afraid that they will not be believed. Cases like this weekend's non-existent abduction and assault in Etobicoke only make those fears worse.

"They think that because this woman was found to be lying then everyone will think that they're lying," she said.

Det. Flis, whose unit deals with the most difficult sex-crime cases, agreed. "There's no doubt that for a victim to come forward in a sexual assault case is a difficult thing," she said.

"There's a lot of guilt, shame, self-blaming.? It's a heavy burden to go through."

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