

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

False sexual assault reports strain police resources

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When a 13-year-old Corona girl reported Nov. 16 that she had been sexually assaulted by an unknown person, police found evidence that a crime had occurred — as well as evidence that cast doubt on her story.

Despite questions, the Corona Police Department, fearing that the perpetrator was real and was a threat to others, immediately launched an investigation. Fifteen investigators, some pausing on other cases, took part in several briefings, a drawing of the suspect was sketched, fliers were distributed, officers went door to door, detectives conducted surveillance, video was obtained from businesses and people were questioned.

Then, two weeks later, the girl admitted making up parts of her account to avoid getting in trouble for other activity.

Such false reports are a concern for all Inland law-enforcement agencies because they take their attention from real crime. It also causes authorities to question legitimate reports, an advocate for sexual-assault victims said.

“It definitely drains our resources. It causes us to divert our energy and our time to a crime that didn’t occur,” said Murrieta police Capt. Mike Baray, who helped investigate a false allegation in 2002 that tied up officers in Riverside and Los Angeles counties.

“Cases have to be re-prioritized and refocused,” Corona Capt. Michael Abel said.

Corona is still weighing a charge of filing a false police report against the girl, Abel said.

A MASSIVE LIE

In August 2002, 29-year-old Tasha Rose Boldt reported being carjacked in Murrieta, sexually assaulted in Lake Elsinore and left bound with duct tape in Griffith Park in Los Angeles.

The LA Police Department searched the park by foot, horseback, helicopter and with police dogs, according to reports at the time. Murrieta police pulled five investigators and a sergeant off other cases and drew a composite sketch of the suspect, Baray said. Investigators contacted every parole agent in the state.

Days later, when police confronted Boldt with inconsistencies between her report and the evidence, she admitted making up the story to prevent her husband from knowing that she was going to LA to see a man she had met on the Internet.

Boldt pleaded guilty to filing a false police report. She was sentenced to 180 days in jail.

Carol Tracy is executive director of the Pennsylvania-based Women's Law Project, which is devoted to improving the legal status of women. She said she worries that false reports reinforce what she considers an existing bias among law enforcement nationwide that many legitimate reports are hoaxes. As a result, she said, rapes are sometimes not properly investigated.

That bias, along with heavy questioning, sometimes dissuades sexual assault victims from reporting crimes, Tracy said.

"What's also important to add is that these (false reports) are minute and are no greater than the number of false reports of other crimes," Tracy said.

Corona's Abel said his department's investigation showed no hint of such bias.

“This case shows just the opposite,” he said. “We had conflicting evidence but that didn’t stop us from proceeding as if it happened.”

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