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## 08.10.03 Kobe case disturbs survivors of rape

By KRISTY ECKERT *The Daily Sentinel*

She remembers vividly the liquor on his breath. The strength he used to pin and penetrate her body. How she hid in the dark bushes for an hour afterward before running for help.

And when Donna Scott first saw Kobe Bryant's rape charges flash across the news, she was there, on that life-altering night, all over again.

"It took me back to then," said Scott, 48, a rape survivor who is now an advocate for other victims. "I remember just feeling everything I felt that evening. I didn't feel good that day."

She is one of many rape survivors reliving personal horrors as media attention on the Bryant case thrusts the issue of rape into the national limelight.

The attention is stirring up old memories in sexual assault victims and might discourage future victims from reporting rape, Scott and other advocates say.

Kathie Kramer, spokeswoman for Denver's Rape Assistance and Awareness Program, said some former clients have called requesting special groups to address the issue of relived trauma because of the Bryant case, an idea her organization is exploring.

"We've gotten some calls from former clients who said that all this stuff in the news has been bringing up their circumstance," Kramer said. "They're just rehashing it."

Cynthia Stone, spokeswoman for the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, agreed that the in-your-face coverage of Bryant's case could be harmful to people who have been sexually assaulted.

"This could be stirring up a lot," she said. "It's so much in the news, this issue, that I'm sure it could be stirring up and sort of bringing this issue back up to people who have gone through this."

Los Angeles Lakers superstar Bryant, 24, has been charged with sexually assaulting a 19-year-old Colorado woman June 30 while staying at the posh mountain resort where she worked.

Bryant has said the sex was consensual.

Victim advocates also fear the scrutiny with which the media has explored the personality of Bryant's accuser will discourage victims from reporting rape.

"For very obvious reasons — and they're very well-illustrated in this specific case — women are afraid of not being believed, or being blamed," Stone said. "It's having their entire lives scrutinized whether it's relevant to this particular case or not."

Already, a rape is attempted or occurs once every 96 seconds, and only 16 percent of rapes are reported nationally, according to Stone's group.

Bryant's accuser has been heralded by some as a popular small-town girl and smeared by others who accuse her of being an unstable, attention-seeking college student.

"After seeing what this young woman, the (alleged) victim in the Kobe Bryant case, has gone through, (victims) would really, I'm sure, think twice about reporting," Stone said.

Mike Domitrz, who has authored a book about sexual assault awareness and travels the country speaking about the issue, agreed the Bryant case will affect former and future sexual-assault victims.

Victims might want to report a rape, but could now think back to this situation and hesitate, said Domitrz, who lives in Milwaukee and whose sister is a rape victim.

"I know I want to speak out. I know I want to do something. But I don't know if I want to go through that," Domitrz said victims might think.

He added that society is "missing the boat" when seemingly putting Bryant on a personality trial.

"What that's saying is, if you're a good guy, you could never do this," Domitrz said. "We could be dealing with an issue here of one person assumed he knew what the other person wanted."

Even people dating make the mistake of assuming their partner wants something sexually that they do not, Domitrz said.

"So we're missing the boat when we say, 'Is he a good guy or not?' It's, 'Did he have consent?' " he said. "The fact is, he's got to have consent. The onus is not on her to stop the crime."

Scott, who now lives in Detroit, said Bryant's case has evoked an onslaught of emotions.

She is sad rape prevention advocates were not around when she was assaulted, but is glad she can now help others.

She is sad she was too scared to take her rapist to court.

She is sad as a black woman that some people are making the case a race issue.

She is frustrated people are lambasting the alleged victim and wonders, "What would they have done to me?"

She hopes all the attention on the issue is not just "must-see TV," she said.

She hopes people are becoming educated on the issue of sexual assault.

"We need to change from this whole thing," Scott said. "And that's the thing that has been my heart's desire."

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