

SECTION V

LIAISON WITH NON-POLICE ORGANISATIONS AND
REFERRAL AGENCIES

Section V: Liaison with non-police organisations and referral agencies.

Sexual assault of women and children are crimes and as such the police role is crucial. However, these crimes are singular crimes presenting problems for the complainants which are not entirely legal and presenting difficulties for law enforcement officials for which they are not adequately prepared. Abused children, for example, lose self esteem and trust and police personnel are not trained to deal with this. In sexual crimes, also, follow-up treatment of the complainant is essential. Although an investigation may appear to be complete and conviction acquired, treatment of the abuse will not be until well after the trial. Because of the singular nature of sexual crimes, effective case management and investigation may require co-ordination with non police agencies, such as social services.

The police have had significant experience of co-operation and co-ordination with hospitals and medical personnel, but co-ordination with other agencies is more recent. In some jurisdictions, this co-ordination has been taken so far that investigation of child sexual abuse is undertaken jointly by the social services and police (see, for example, H.M.S.O: Child Sexual Abuse: Joint Investigation Project: Final Report: London: 1987). While in most co-ordination has been confined to using counselling agencies to help complainants come to terms with the assault. No matter what form the co-ordination takes, careful management is essential. A multi-disciplinary approach is very valuable in the context of sexual crimes, but careful protocols must be introduced to prevent the complainant from being 'revictimised' by having to repeat her complaint to a number of agencies. Clearly, training of all agencies involved is essential, it being particularly essential that other agencies be trained to understand the police perspective. Critical also is the development of clear protocols to encourage sharing of information between agencies but which protects confidentiality at the same time.

Guidelines:

- * Sexual crimes are singular crimes requiring the use of skills beyond those of the police. Such crimes benefit from a multi disciplinary approach.
- * Liaison with non police agencies must be carefully managed both to protect the complainant and achieve the best results for her.
- * This liaison can be important not only in the management in particular cases but also as a means to train the police and other organisations. For example, perspectives of rape crisis centres should be well known by the police and taken account of seriously.
- * Liaison with other agencies requires face to face meetings to encourage interagency co-operation and to tease out any misunderstanding which may develop between different disciplines.

* Police, non police organisations and referral agencies should share as much information as possible, at all times protecting the confidentiality of the complainant.

* Care should be taken to determine whether the concept of confidentiality is being used at the expense of the complainant.

* While police should closely liaise with non police bodies in the context of sexual crime, it must not be forgotten that these assaults are criminal and must be prosecuted. It is essential, therefore, that the police retain control in any situation where liaison is advocated.