False rape reports make victims ‘more silenced, more reluctant’

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By Rick McCrabb, Staff Writer

BUTLER COUNTY —

It’s estimated that only 2 percent to 10 percent of rape reports are false allegations or are recanted, but they can cause “collateral damage,” according to law enforcement and sexual assault experts.

Butler County Prosecutor Michael Gmoser said his office takes all false reports — not just rape cases — seriously. But false rape reports create “a disservice to the legitimate claims,” he said.

“If a woman hears about a false report, another woman who was raped may ask, ‘Will they think the same thing about me?’ ” Gmoser said.

Jane Conn, executive director of Abuse and Rape Crisis Center of Warren County said when a false report is filed, it taints the credibility of future victims.

“It changes, in a negative way, the public’s perception of reporting,” she said.
Every time Becky Perkins of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence hears about a false rape report she “cringes,” she said.

“That makes it difficult to come forward,” said Perkins, of Monroe. “All victims feel more silenced, more reluctant. All victims have the fear of not being believed.”

Perkins said the way the media covers rapes and false rape reports also can influence “true” rape victims. Typically, she said, the media reports on cases where the victim didn’t know the alleged assailant, those involving celebrities and those that are false. That makes rape victims less likely to contact police, Perkins said.

“They think, ‘No way are they going to believe me,’” she said. “They feel overwhelmed in the process. And then they say, ‘Forget it. Forget it. I don’t want to do this.’”

Gmoser warned that anyone who files a false rape report, a first-degree misdemeanor, will be prosecuted by his office.

“Make sure that is clear,” he said.

Earlier this month, a Middletown woman was charged with making false reports and falsification, both first-degree misdemeanors, after she alleged she was raped by her estranged husband.

Misty Mackey, 35, initially told Middletown police she was raped in the 1300 block of Oxford State Road. Her estranged husband was charged with rape and domestic violence, charges that eventually were dropped in Middletown Municipal Court, according to police.

During an investigation with a Middletown detective, Mackey admitted she lied about all the facts about the rape, domestic violence and burglary. She told a detective she invited her estranged husband to her home, where they engaged in consensual sexual relations involving role playing, police said.

She has hired an attorney and her pre-trial hearing was continued last week until 9 a.m. July 12, according to court records.

Alleged false rape reports like this example are “very, very rare,” and there typically is “more to the story,” said Kristin Shrimplin, executive director of Women Helping Women, a Butler County agency that empowers survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking by providing advocacy, support and options for safety and educates the community to create social change.

But she called false rape reports “concerning” because they cause a rape victim from not coming forward and filing charges.

“It takes a lot of courage to stand up and say, ‘I’ve been sexually assaulted,’” aloud and to be believed,” Shrimplin said.
She said studies have shown that 25 percent of women said they were sexually violated before their 18th birthday and 33 percent said it happened in their lifetime. So when a woman who has been assaulted contacts Women Helping Women, Shrimplin said “we believe them and support them.”

Then she added: “We stand behind the survivors.”

Rape is back in the news after Brock Turner, a standout swimmer from Oakwood High School and Stanford University, was convicted of three felony charges stemming from a sexual assault that occurred after a fraternity party in January 2015. He was sentenced to six months in county jail in Palto Alto, Calif., for sexually assaulting an unconscious, intoxicated woman.

Turner, 20, had faced up to 10 years in prison, and with good behavior, could be out in three months. He also must register as a sex offender for the rest of his life and would have three years of probation following his release.

That sentence, perceived by some to be too light for the crime, has been heavily criticized in social media.

Perkins said when Turner was convicted of rape, there was reason to “celebrate and be happy.”

Then came what she called the “low sentence” that didn’t match the severity of the crime.

“Incredibly frustrating,” was her reaction.

Shrimplin said the Stanford case has created dialogue about sexual assaults, a welcome trend for those in her field.

“We can’t treat this as some hidden secret,” she said. “This is a public health epidemic.”

She wondered the reaction in a community if its residents found out that 25 percent of its water supply had lead poisoning. Sexual assaults “impact all of us,” she said.

Shrimplin urged parents of high school and college students to talk to their children about the proper way to treat a woman and the dangers of sexual assaults. She said every fall on college campuses “is a real dangerous time,” especially for freshman females. She said they may be considered easy prey for predators.

Also, Shrimplin said, women need to remember that nothing they do — their clothing, their appearance — gives anyone a right to sexually assault them. There is no excuse for rape, she said.

“It is a choice a sexual violators makes against another human being,” she said.