Probes end when alleged victim recants

Feb. 26, 2003

An Indiana State University student who reported she was abducted from campus, held against her will and sexually assaulted has recanted a portion of her statement, ending a weeklong police investigation into her claim.

The 20-year-old student, whose name was not released by campus police, signed a statement Tuesday morning stating the abduction did not occur.

"I originally did not intend for the police to become involved and what did occur was a personal matter between a person I have known and myself," a copy of the typed statement indicates.

Bill Mercier, ISU director of public safety, said the student made the admission when confronted by campus police.

"We had uncovered some information that was clearly inconsistent with what she told us before," Mercier said, declining to elaborate.

The student will not be charged with any crime.

Originally, she told police that around 11:30 p.m. Feb. 17, she was trying to get into her car along North Fourth Street in Terre Haute when she was approached by a male who offered her a ride. After she declined, she was pulled into the back seat of
a car where a female placed a blanket over her head, the report made in the early morning hours of Feb. 19 indicates.

The student reported being driven away to an unknown house or apartment, locked in a room and forced to give and receive oral sex with the female. In addition, she reported that the male suspect fondled her, according to a copy of the report.

About 24 hours after the abduction, the student talked the couple into letting her use a telephone, she reported. The student had said she was taken to First and Chestnut streets, where she was let out of the vehicle and told to return after using the phone. When she returned 15 minutes later, the people were gone, she told officers, adding that she ran past the city Police Department to Day's Inn, where a night clerk called police.

She was taken to Union Hospital, where she declined a rape examination, the report indicates.

Initially, police corroborated portions of the woman's story, but on Monday started having "serious doubts" about what she had reported when inconsistencies arose between what was discovered during the investigation and the woman's initial report, Mercier said.

"The whole story was somewhat bizarre from the beginning," he acknowledged.

During a scheduled appointment with investigators Tuesday morning, the student "voluntarily made the decision to clear this matter," according to a copy of the signed statement provided by campus police. The student's name was blacked out in the copy provided to the Tribune-Star.

When she retracted her statement about the abduction, the student would not elaborate about what occurred during the time frame she had reported being held against her will, Mercier said.
Mercier acknowledged that it's possible something happened to the student. "But without her willingness to talk to [police] or clarify it as a crime, our investigation is finished," he said.

Campus police spent between 100 and 300 man-hours on the weeklong investigation. Two campus officers were dedicated to the efforts, with two others assisting, Mercier said.

Separately, a city police detective sketched a composite of one of the suspects and was working on a second composite before the student retracted her story.

Vigo County Prosecutor Bob Wright said the decision was made not to file any criminal charge in the matter.

"Basically, after talking with the ISU police officers, we were of the opinion that the person did understand the seriousness of her report and the police officers were of the opinion that she had suffered enough in this matter," Wright said. "Basically, we relied on their judgment and decided not to file false informing charges."

When contacted by the Tribune-Star, the student said she wanted the whole matter behind her and declined to discuss any specifics of the case.

ISU students had mixed reaction to the woman's retraction of the reported abduction.

Emily Greene, a 19-year-old freshman from Richmond, said she was worried the case could have an impact on future investigations. "They're not going to be taken seriously," Greene said of her concerns about reports of similar nature.

Stacie Hynok, a sophomore, pointed out one good outcome of the case.

In the days after the student's report, campus police warned students not to walk alone and reminded them of the availability of an escort service to campus locations.

"It's still important to get the message out there," Hynok said.
Karin Grunden can be reached at (812) 231-4214 or karin.grunden@tribstar.com.