

'We are branded as prostitutes' — rape meeting

By LIZ RICHARDS

COLOURED women in Bristol are being branded by police as prostitutes as they walk through the streets at night, said Mrs Norma Steele, of the Black Women for Wages for Housework group.

"Many of us, who are forced to live in areas like St Paul's and also have to work at night, have to walk home.

"The police are on the look out for prostitutes and so if they see a woman alone their attitude is that we are all prostitutes."

Mrs Steele (27), a mother of two, who lives in Montpelier, was one of five speakers at a Women Against Rape meeting held in Stokes Croft, Bristol, last night.

All five attacked the police, and also the courts, for their attitude to rape victims.

HIDDEN

Mrs Steele said: "Women just do not trust the police or the social workers. They are afraid to report a rape because of the attitude from police."

The all-woman meeting, attended by about 40 heard from Ruth Hall, Women Against Rape, London, that there is a great deal of hidden rape.

The campaign will eventually be asking the Government for several changes in the present law, including

compensation for rape victims.

Mrs Hall said WAR were concerned at the attitude of the courts and to "go-ahead" sentences passed on rapists.

"The Home Secretary will have to act. At the moment, the police back up the rapist, the courts back the police and then the Government is, as such, backing up the rapist.

'PAY'

"When society has to pay for rape, then they will stop it. We believe we can stop rape. It is not here to stay. It is intolerable."

WAR are also campaigning for rape in marriage to be recognised as a crime.

A meeting to form a Bristol group of WAR is being held at 79, Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol at 8 pm on December 14.



Bristol speakers at last night's Women Against Rape meeting held in the Swan Inn, Stokes Croft (from left) Sue Fleming, Norma Steele, Karen Crocker and Jenny Smith, with their petition, calling for changes in the present rape law

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AID BID BY RAPE VICTIMS

A CALL for the Government to compensate rape victims was made last night at a Bristol meeting for women.

Ruth Hall, aged 28, from the London Wages For Housework Campaign said: "We think the state should pay for rape. Once it has to pay, it will take steps to stop it."

Nearly 50 women were at the meeting, at The Swan, Stokes Croft.

One of the speakers was Bristol rape victim Karen Crocker, 21, now living in Hull, who described her experience and the effect of the court case when the judge said that no real lasting harm had been done to her.

Norma Steele, of the Bristol Black Women for Wages for Housework, said black women in St Paul's, Bristol, were in particular danger from rape because police regarded all women there as prostitutes.

"We are not able to report rape because of the attitude of the police."

'It doesn't matter...'

I was very pleased with the coverage your newspaper gave to the recent Women Against Rape meeting.

However I am rather concerned at the implications drawn from the first part of the report about prostitutes, which suggested I regard prostitution as a disrespectful job. The point I was making was that I believe the police treat black women in the same way they treat prostitutes — with insults and the assumption that if the woman is raped it doesn't matter.

Attitude

As I said at the meeting, the police view is that prostitutes can't be raped. Anyone "on the game" is supposed to have asked for it. But rape is rape whatever the work the woman is doing and this whole attitude of the police, I believe, increases the likelihood of prostitutes and every other woman getting raped.

And the attitude to black women generally means that we face rape and are unable to report this to the police,

N J Steele
Black Women For
Wages For Housework
94, Richmond Road,
Montpelier, Bristol 6.