



Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team
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**Sexual Assault Prevention
Action Team 2005-2006**

Children's Assessment Center

Child and Family Resource
Council

Grand Rapids Institute for
Information Democracy

Grand Valley State University
Women's Center

Kent County 17th District Family
Court

Kent County Health Department

Kent County Sheriff Department

YWCA Sexual Assault Program

Dear FCC Licensing Renewal Commission,

Starting in 2001, and ongoing, the Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team began to monitor local TV and radio coverage of crimes of sexual violence and sexual abuse. In summary, this analysis of local news coverage revealed that the media is highly selective in its reporting on sexual violence, therefore providing misleading information to the public. For example, almost all of the news reports on sexual violence dealt exclusively with assaults committed by strangers. The fact is most rapes, sexual assaults, and sexual abuse is committed by someone familiar to the victim. Clearly this slanted news coverage is inaccurately leading the public to believe that stranger rape is the biggest concern and not informing the public that a vast majority of sexual violence is committed by someone known to the victim. In Kent County, in 2004, 72% of sexual assaults were committed by a non-stranger. Nationally, 80% of reported sexual assaults are committed by a non-stranger. The perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse are most often a family member, ex husband or boyfriend, friend or an acquaintance.

News reports also sensationalized sexual violence and were insensitive to the victim and victim's family. In one TV news report, video footage of the victim's dead body being put in an ambulance was shown. In other reports, TV video footage of the victim's neighborhood, home and even bedroom were included in the news story. Also, interviews with friends and neighbors were included in the TV news reports. Although victim's names were never revealed, to many viewers the victim's identity would be quite obvious. These victim's have a right to privacy and it was not respected. Some of these victims were children.

Finally, local media chooses to almost exclusively include only informational interviews with law enforcement in sexual violence coverage. Although the law enforcement perspective is relevant, there are many other sexual violence experts (rape crisis center staff, counselors, prevention educators) that could provide valuable, helpful information to the public. In addition, none of the news coverage of sexual violence included information on local community services for local rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse victims (YWCA 24-hour rape crisis hotline 776-RAPE).

Best Regards,

Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team

The Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team was formed in 1999 and consists of local experts in the field of sexual assault prevention, treatment and law enforcement. The action team is committed to reducing the incidence of sexual perpetration and victimization in our community.