

RCMP more willing to charge batterers

By LIZ DELAHEY 50-43190

EDMONTON (Staff) — On average a woman is beaten 35 times before she calls the police, Sgt. Wayne Gesy told the Alberta Women's Institutes.

The RCMP co-ordinator of violence and victim service for Alberta said there is a pattern of tension building, abuse, release of tension, remorse and a so-called honeymoon stage when the marriage is blissful. Then the cycle begins again. But each time a beating occurs, the honeymoon period is shorter and the abuse becomes more frequent.

That is why the RCMP lays charges if they find evidence of abuse, Gesy said. They know it has probably occurred many times before and may become worse the next time. A wife may try to withdraw the charges if the couple is going through the honeymoon phase because she believes it will never happen again.

Police attitude to spouse abuse is gradually changing, much as society's is, Gesy said. At one time it was felt what went on within a home was strictly a family affair, but more and more abused wives, or other family members phone the RCMP for help because they can't stand the violence any more. And society is saying wife beating is no longer a private matter.

For the past three years in Canada, Gesy said, the police have had the power to lay charges if they feel there has been an offence. If they feel the evidence is not there, they can instruct the assaulted party to lay charges themselves.

The RCMP can only arrest and detain a man who has beaten his wife if they have to preserve the evidence at the scene, or if it appears the person will repeat the offence, or will not appear in court.

If the police are called to the

scene and there are signs of a fight, the wife has a black eye, but the husband has calmed down, has a steady job and isn't likely to leave town, he cannot be arrested.

Police often have the attitude that they'd rather not become involved because spousal disputes were the number two cop killer in 1982 and because they often see the victim return to the abusing husband.

Because laying charges is discretionary, training police officers to change old attitudes is necessary, Gesy said.

A man who beats his wife tends to blame everyone but himself for events that occur and generally expresses his emotions in anger. He is dependent on and possessive of his spouse and tries to control and dominate. He thinks it is his job to keep the family in line. The batterer generally comes from a home where wife beating has occurred before.

The victim has usually been raised to be a good wife and mother and feels that somehow the abuse must be her fault.

No one agency can effectively deal with the problem of wife abuse, Gesy said. It takes the co-operation of police, social services, mental health agencies and victim groups working together. People in shelters can help explain to police why the victim keeps returning home, Gesy said.

The RCMP sergeant urged AWI members to become involved by gathering information at the local level on the severity of the problem, preparing directories and looking at the victim services available, watching out for children whose behavior indicates there is something wrong at home, and establishing temporary safe homes in surrounding communities.

Above all, get involved and let the victims know they are not alone, that it does happen to other people and that there is help available, he said.