

Interviewee: Angela Marie MacDougall (AMM)

Interviewer: Jill Bennett (JB)

JB: Well, two people sentenced in connection with a series of sexual assaults that took place in Metro Vancouver earlier this year, will not be facing any time behind bars. Police say the arrests came after much cooperation involving police forces in Metro Vancouver as well as the Real Time Intelligence Centre and the RCMP Behavioral Sciences Unit. We now know that two of the accused will face the following penalties. One – a North Vancouver man charged with two sexual assaults—or, sorry – one in North Vancouver, one in Downtown Vancouver, has been handed a suspended sentence, 18 months' probation, and he has been ordered to give a DNA sample. Another, an unnamed youth facing two counts of sexual assault, two of committing an indecent act in Vancouver, will face six months deferred custody. The youth equivalent of a conditional sentence. He has also been handed a firearms ban. And there are three others that are still awaiting sentencing. Joining me on the line is Angela Marie MacDougall. She is the Executive Director of the Battered Women's Support Services. Angela – thank you so much for being with us.

AMM: Good morning, Jill.

JB: What is your response when you hear – following these cases through the courts and hear the type of sentences we see for those accused and charged with sexual assault?

AMM: Well, I think it's disappointing on many levels. Firstly, we pay very close attention to the amount of, what we observed were serial stranger sexual assaults that were happening in Metro Vancouver over a period of time, and the level of fear that women were experiencing at that time, and then knowing, in lots of conversations that I had with law enforcement around the...how they were notifying women, and then also the investigation...was that the law enforcement – the Vancouver Police Department specifically and others – put a lot of resources into the investigation and into the arrests. And it was really surprising to see this outcome. You know, it just sends this message repeatedly to women – not only here in Metro Vancouver, but all across the lands, you know that sexual violence – sexual assault – is not taken seriously.

JB: And we heard that as well...I know in our news room we were talking with Hilla Kerner with Vancouver Rape Relief...

AMM: Yeah.

JB: ...and she echoed those concerns, saying no jail time sends the wrong message to anyone who thinks about committing a sexual assault or has committed a sexual assault – that you can get away with it.

AMM: Well here's the thing that people need to understand – and I think every woman really understands this – that we really do live in a culture of permissiveness around rape, and that for rape of one woman, it is about degradation and terror, and most women and girls limit their behavior because of the existence of rape – stranger rape – and we know that stranger rape is actually the least amount of sexual assault that actually happens. Most times if women are sexually assaulted it's by someone that they know. And, but most women and girls are living in fear of rape, and men in general do not! And that's how rape functions as a very, very, very powerful means by which the entire *whole* female population is held in a subordinate position to the whole male population. And when these serial rapes were happening in Metro Vancouver, I

spoke to countless women and young...and youth that were terrified. And to think about that...and to think about at the end of the day there isn't a measure of justice that these offenders that have been arrested and convicted receive virtually...virtually no consequence – the fact that Law Enforcement invested considerable resources – they put in a *tonne* of money into staffing the task force in order to catch the six offenders that they caught – the six men that they caught...and boys – let's remember that one of the individuals that we're talking about is a young man – a young person. And so, you know, it's ah... (*chuckles*)...I think this is, again, what we see consistently across our society, it's the extent to which society is not taking sexual violence against women seriously. And that women are, in various levels, living in fear on a daily basis or rape!

JB: And you use the word *rape* as well. And do we do ourselves a disservice in using the umbrella term of sexual assault? Because even if you look at the numbers – and I think...we've talked about this. If you look at the numbers of reported sexual assaults in Vancouver over the past ten years, it's more than 5000, but that goes from everything from a groping and somebody running off to a rape. Do we need to be more definitive in what we're talking about in these specific cases?

AMM: Well, in some ways, yes, and in some ways, no. I think that when we're, uh...you know any kind of sexual...unwanted...non-consensual...when there isn't consent with respect to sexual contact, is a sexual assault. And so I think that we've been trying to become more aware of consent, and raising...you know, increasing understanding about consent. And so, on that level, that matters. Because they're...in order to, you know – I think that we...a broad education around what is consent and how...you know, and how do you request consent, how do you understand consent? What are the bases of consent, are really important. And so from that point of view, we want to know about sexual offending that happens on transit, which tends to be, you know, groping and other types of sexual...unwanted sexual contact. We want to know about that, because it's another facet of sexual violence within a culture of rape that women and girls are living with. And so, you know, I think that when we start to split the hairs on that, it matters on some level, but on another level, we want to look at how endemic sexual violence is, how much of an epidemic it is, and the effects on women and girls every single day.

JB: I totally agree. I was thinking more along the lines of sentencing, while none of it is okay, the sentencing for somebody, perhaps, that groped somebody or grabbed somebody without...and did that would likely be much different from somebody who performed a violent sexual assault.

AMM: Well, one of the things that is a factor here, is that when these instances...we're talking about stranger sexual assault, and that is...that, you know, all police research, all kinds of, you know, research around criminal behavior and behavior around sexual violence acknowledges that stranger sexual assault is aggravated, and it is a significant social and public safety concern when a man, or in this instance a young man or young person...a young boy, does sexual violence in public – it has significance for the general population and around community safety. And so I think that the public aspect is something that all research and certainly feminists and women's organizations have spoken to this – it speaks to something certainly aggravated in the behavior of the man or the boy that's doing that in public. So, it matters that we think about the public and that you would grope someone that you don't know, and you know, to sexual assault someone that you don't know in public is...is extremely problematic behavior. So I don't know that we, um...that we want to minimize that. And I think that certainly with these sentences, we have!

JB: There's been talk of the possibility or the idea of a separate court for sexual assault. Because, you're right – we do minimize it in many cases, and the point being too, even if these men – and it's men in this case – were given jail terms, the point is, we don't want them to get out of jail – we want it to stop. We don't want them to get out of jail and then re-offend.

AMM: Yeah, sure.

JB: Is there something then...like a sexual assault court – something that goes to the root of the problem, which is *why* are these men doing this? Why do these men think it's okay, and trying to stem it there?

AMM: The criminal legal system can only do so much, and what we know is that most sexual assault is not reported to the police, and for those sexual assaults, you quoted some statistics that have become public recently in terms of reports in Metro Vancouver, but actually with the VPD, most is not...the vast majority...8%, by Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre – by their statistics – about 8% is actually reported to police. The vast majority is not. So the criminal legal system can only do so much! We actually need to do a bigger, uh, piece of work as a society around helping men, quite frankly...teaching...rather than teaching women about how to avoid getting raped, in terms of where we are at night and not, you know, dressing, and if we're drinking...but rather to teach men not to rape! And to be very clear – to send that message, this is not on! We are not tolerating this in this community! We will not tolerate it! It is unacceptable, and to make that point on *all* levels of our society from, you know...and throughout our society. I mean, you know, there's still silenced by our elected officials with respect to the amount of terror across Metro Vancouver that girls and women were experiencing during the time where there were these serial rapes. Not a *peep* from elected officials regarding this! It was astonishing that we could see that a por...more than half the population, in terms of women and girls being, you know, at least 50% if not more, of the population being in fear, and *nothing* – not a word!

JB: Angela, I couldn't agree with you more, we need to do more to make it stop, to stop it being the women's problem to defend ourselves rather than going after the source of the violence. We'll have to leave it there – we're out of time – but thank you so much. I always appreciate you coming on the show.

AMM: Thank you, Jill, for the opportunity to speak to this.

JB: All right. That is Angela Marie MacDougall, the Executive Director of the Battered Women's Support Services. We'll take a short break before we are back to wrap up the show.