

Rally shines light on crimes against women

By Dolores M. Bernal SUN-NEWS REPORTER

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Students at New Mexico State University took a stand against sexual assault during Thursday's "Take Back The Night" rally on campus.

It was the third year that the event was organized by NMSU's Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education program or WAVE.

The event takes place in April at numerous college campuses across the country to raise awareness of rape, sexual harassment and other crimes against women.

"Sexual assault is an issue that happens behind closed doors and that people many times don't want to report," said Casey Akins of WAVE. "In an event like this one, we bring the issue out to the open, out of the darkness."

About 440 women on college campuses are victims of sexual assault every year, Akins said.

Few women at NMSU report the crimes to campus or local police because most of them may feel ashamed or don't want anyone to know what happened to them, said Jessica Adkisson, also of WAVE.

Women are often afraid of retaliation if they report an incident to police or may feel embarrassed because they think that they are at fault, Adkisson said.

"Our society tends to blame the victim. It's a stigma, and they think that it was your fault because you were drunk or dressed provocative, but that is false," she said.

Victims are, however, more likely to seek help through community organizations such as La Piñon or La Casa, Adkisson said.

These organizations offer counseling services and can refer victims to health agencies.

Mary Carney, a graduate student studying health science, has been attending Take Back the Night rallies since she was an undergraduate.

"It's an important event because it raises issues of violence against women," Carney said. "It's an issue that is not talked about. It's not highlighted too much on the news, yet it is so pervasive."

Daniel Alkob is a junior majoring in fine arts, who stumbled onto Thursday's event, picked up some of WAVE's literature and decided to watch what was going on, as students rallied at the corner of Espina and University Avenue.

The pamphlets had a lot of good information about what to look out for -- like date rape pills, Alkob said. "Men shouldn't let other men rape women, approve of it, condone it or even think that it's funny."

Dolores M. Bernal can be reached at dbernal@lcsun-news.com