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Correction Appended

SECTION: METRO; Pg. B05

HEADLINE: Woman Fatally Stabbed Near NE Home After Date; Victim
Had Sought Domestic Violence Help From Court

BYLINE: Arthur Santana , Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

D.C. police are looking for a suspect in the stabbing death of a Northeast Washington woman whose body was found Tuesday in an alley half a block from her home.

Nicole Carry McNeil, 19, was attacked in the 1600 block of Isherwood Street as she returned home from a date about 4:30 a.m., police said.

D.C. police won't discuss details of the slaying, citing an ongoing investigation. However, officers in the 5th District said last night that they have a suspect but that he is not in custody.

McNeil had obtained and then withdrawn a civil protection order this year against her ex-boyfriend, whose child she bore in March, according to Nancy Meyer, executive director of the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a nonprofit information and referral center for Washington's battered women.

On Monday night, McNeil went on a second date with another man-- part of her way of "making a brand-new start," which also included starting a nursing career, said McNeil's aunt, Frankie Clark.

McNeil's mother, Catherine McNeil, said that when her daughter returned home Tuesday morning, an assailant grabbed her, dragging away the 5-foot-4, 95-pound woman, who was kicking and screaming. McNeil's date ran to tell the mother what was happening, Clark said.

Catherine McNeil said that the man believed to be the assailant had tried to break into their second-floor apartment about 3 that

morning through a back stairway and that she called police. "And they never came," McNeil said.

Police spokesman Kervin Johnson said that no 5th District police officials with knowledge of that phone call were available to comment last night.

McNeil said she and her daughter's two children are staying with family members in the area because they are afraid for their safety while the attacker is still at large.

Support groups say McNeil's case is an all-too-common story of domestic violence in Washington, where thousands of women each year seek help from police and the courts--many times in vain--to separate them from their abusers.

"The whole system for responding to domestic violence in the District is really just completely inadequate," Meyer said.

Meyer said McNeil, like about 5,000 other women each year, had gone to the domestic violence center at D.C. Superior Court this year, seeking assistance after repeated threats by her ex-boyfriend.

McNeil was granted a civil protection order by the court, which told the ex-boyfriend to stay away, but for some reason, she later dropped the protection order, Meyer said, adding that it's not uncommon for someone to coerce a battered partner to take such action.

Meyer said the ex-boyfriend has a record of offenses, including a number of arrests for assault and drug possession, violation of a protective order and assault with a deadly weapon.

"A [coalition] review of cases of battered women who have been murdered over the last several years reveals a pattern of partners or boyfriends charged with criminal offenses that have, for the most part, been dropped by the prosecutor's office," Meyer said.

Larisa Kofman, program and development specialist for the coalition, said D.C. police handled nearly 3,000 cases of domestic violence in 1998, down from 4,600 in 1997, according to a 1998 annual report. The police department could not provide last year's data.

Citing U.S. Department of Justice information, Kofman said nearly half of domestic violence cases are never reported. "We know that one out of three or four women will experience some form of abuse or violence [at the hands of a partner] in her lifetime," she said.

Staff writer Allan Lengel contributed to this report.

CORRECTION-DATE: October 20, 2000

CORRECTION:

An Oct. 19 Metro article about the stabbing death of Nicole Carry McNeil had information attributed to the wrong sources in some editions. The article should have said that the D.C. police could not provide last year's data on domestic violence, that an official with the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence said McNeil had filed and then withdrawn a civil protection order against her ex-boyfriend, and that D.C. police said there was a suspect in the case.