

## Three Women Freed After Years in Captivity

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

American police are praising the bravery of three women who were found alive this week after 10 years of captivity. The three kidnap victims were recovered late Monday from a house in Cleveland, Ohio. They were discovered after neighbors heard shouts for help from Amanda Berry. One neighbor kicked through a door to help her and her daughter escape and call the police.

“Help me! I am Amanda Berry. I need police. I have been kidnapped and I have been missing for 10 years, and I am here. I am free now.”

Police found the other young women, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight, inside the house.

Government lawyers have brought charges against the owner of the building. Fifty-two year-old Ariel Castro is facing criminal charges on four kidnappings and three charges of rape.

The kidnapping charges are for each of the three women and the six-year old girl who was born while Amanda Berry was held captive. An Ohio official says genetic tests showed that the child’s father was Ariel Castro.

Prosecutors said Thursday they may ask a court to sentence Mr. Castro to death. Police have said he starved and beat one woman to forcefully end her pregnancies. Officials say he could face hundreds of charges for each act of sexual violence.

The families of the three women say they are thankful to have them back. They praised them as strong women to have survived 10 years of captivity and abuse.

Amanda Berry was reported missing in 2003 at the age of 16. Fourteen-year-old Gina DeJesus disappeared a year later on her way home from school. Michele Knight was about 20 years old when she disappeared in 2002.

Police say Ariel Castro kept the young women in different rooms and tied them with ropes and chains.

On Thursday, a judge ordered the suspect held in jail. The judge set bail at eight million dollars. The large amount is evidence of the severity of the crimes. It will effectively prevent Ariel Castro from being released before his trial begins.

Experts say cases involving kidnap victims who are found alive years after they went missing are rare.

Robert Lowery leads the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. He says about 100 children are kidnapped by sex criminals every year.

Mr. Lowery is a retired police officer. He tells parents not to live in fear, but to empower children.

“And if someone tries to grab them we really encourage parents to tell their children, ‘Fight back, kick scream, bring as much attention to that situation as you can because, it's the assertive children that we find that are escaping from the clutches of these kind of offenders.”

David Finkelhor leads the Crimes against Children Research Center. He says there are effective treatments for victims of sex crimes. He says survivors need to build good relationships after sexual abuse.

He also says research suggests different rates of sex crimes in different cultures.

“It may be related to cultural factors and the sense of entitlement that men feel, the way in which masculinity is defined, whether sexual prowess is defined as important.”

And he says most cultures need reforms to meet the needs of sexually abused people.

“There is a tremendous need for training and legal reforms and judicial reforms and support groups for victims.”

And that’s In the News. I’m Steve Ember.