

Police, Locals Hunt for Hammer-Wielding Thief

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Local vigilantes in northeastern Moscow started a hunt for a serial attacker who is assaulting women in the area with a hammer, though police were divided as to whether they appreciate amateur help, reports said Monday.

Since Jan. 21, five women aged 40 to 60 were attacked at night in the area, known for its sprawling Losiny Ostrov park. All were hospitalized, and one of the victims, Margarita Shuina, died from her injuries.

The suspect, who took the women's bags and valuables, was caught on camera, but neither footage nor victims' accounts were of much use to investigators because the assailant approached the women from behind and kept his face hidden, Investigative Committee spokeswoman Viktoria Tsyplonkova said Monday.

The victims "said they didn't see the suspect since he was attacking from behind. It is not

possible to recognize his face, since it is covered by a hat,” Tsyplyonkova said, Interfax reported.

Moscow's police chief Vladimir Kolokoltsev pledged in an [interview](#) with Ekho Moskv radio Monday that the “maniac acting in the city's northeast will be captured.”

Meanwhile, area residents have started a group named Patrol to search for the criminal and offer protection, mainly by escorting women home.

The group has identified several suspects, none of whom turned out to be an attacker. It claims to have prevented one attack, calling police after spotting a hammer-wielding man who chased a local teenager, though the suspect fled when officers arrived, Gazeta.ru [reported](#) Monday.

The group's representative, Maria Dudko, told Gazeta.ru that the police appreciate help, but on Monday, several members of Patrol were briefly detained when distributing leaflets about the attack.

“We were told that we are disturbing police work by forcing the attacker to lay low or go to another district,” Patrol member Maria Makhankova told Interfax on Monday.

Moscow police spokeswoman Svetlana Serkina told Komsomolskaya Pravda on Saturday that the locals are “creating panic” by spreading their leaflets.

“They lack skills required to catch criminals. They will get themselves hurt and then blame police,” Serkina said.

Another police spokeswoman told RIA-Novosti on Monday that the criminal is not a psychotic attacker, but apparently a robber, judging by the fact that he was stealing belongings of the victims.

Regardless of the motives, locals are scared.

“I asked my relatives to meet me after work,” said Natalya, an employee with a local Mosmart store who refused to give her last name without elaborating on the reasons. She told The Moscow Times that she has to walk through the park on her way home.

“We are all nervous since we all live here,” an employee of one of the schools in the area said by telephone, without providing her name.

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