

*Child Abuse***PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS**

[English]

CHILDREN**REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE RESPECTING ABUSE AND
NEGLECT****Mr. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury)** moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should direct the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs to study and report back to the House its recommendations in respect to appropriate measures for the prevention, identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and for such other ancillary measures in the same matter as the Committee may consider desirable.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the unanimous consent of all members to make a slight change in my motion, that is, to change the words "Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs" to "Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs", so that the matter would go to a different committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

Mr. Howie: Mr. Speaker, I hope all hon. members will agree with me that the government should direct the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs to study and report back to the House its recommendations in respect of appropriate measures for the prevention, identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and for such other ancillary measures in the same matter as the committee may consider desirable.

I feel that this is a matter of urgent and pressing necessity which requires our immediate consideration and attention. This is not a partisan matter. This is an issue where political affiliation is not of concern. It is a matter which is of the utmost importance and which I feel has the support of many of the members of this House. My plea to this House is: do not let this matter die at the end of this hour. This problem has been with us for too long. I urge hon. members to do their utmost to ensure that this resolution, or one similar to it, is passed as soon as possible.

It has been many years since Jean Jacques Rousseau stated, "Let us speak less of the duties of children and more of their rights". It is indeed time that we act, and those who will benefit most from our action are Canada's greatest asset—Canada's children.

The term "battered child" is one which is often used to describe abused or neglected children. Dr. Henry Kempe of the University of Colorado offered this definition of a battered child, "any child who received non-accidental physical injury or injuries as a result of acts or omissions on the part of his parents or guardians".

There are no accurate national statistics on the incidence of child abuse or neglect. Very little is known about the rate or frequency, but child abuse does exist, and this is a fact. David Bakan, a professor at York University, in his book "Slaughter of the Innocents," which was published in Canada for the CBC learning systems by the Hunter Rose Co., at page 4 of that book, which is in the Parliamentary Library, says:

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

In numerous known and publicly recorded instances children have been victimized by those responsible for their care... How prevalent can such occurrences be? Clearly data are hard to come by because only in the most extreme cases do such things come to public notice. Yet available information strongly suggests that the frequency is far greater than one may naively or hopefully imagine.

In fact a committee of the United States Senate was told at a hearing in 1973 that 60,000 children in that country every year were reported abused, some to the point of permanent injury and even death.

In the province of Ontario, for instance, the chief coroner's office records show that from late 1962 to September of this year 116 children died as a result of abuse or neglect. However, after 1966 when provincial legislation was passed making reporting acts of child abuse mandatory, the number of child fatalities in Ontario due to abuse or neglect decreased by about 50 per cent.

It should be noted that only five provinces have laws making reporting cases of child abuse mandatory. It is estimated that the incidence of child abuse in North America is roughly 250 to 300 per million persons per year. If this is the case then the 600 incidents reported last year in Ontario represent only one quarter of the total number of occurrences in this province. Estimates of actual cases of child abuse in Canada per year range from 1,000 to 10,000.

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The grim reality of child abuse and the shocking revelations of research in this area must spur us, as law makers, into action. In the past Canadian law makers have largely overlooked this problem. Horrifying examples of abused children, often resulting in death, come to our attention through the news media. However, there are many cases of lesser degree, where children have been beaten or neglected, that go unnoticed. Child abuse is not only characterized by extreme physical beatings but may also include sexual abuse, deprivation of normal and sufficient care and nutrition, and neglect on the part of the parents.

Child abuse is not a new problem. It did not start just a few years ago when a group of physicians found the courage to make public knowledge of it. The bible records many instances of child abuse. For example, the story of Moses, in which Pharaoh ordered that all male Jewish children be cast into the river, may be found in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 1, verse 22. Instead of putting him to death, his mother put Moses in a basket, from which he was recovered by a princess.

The writings of Charles Dickens contain ample examples of child abuse, such as the beating scene in David Copperfield. In England, not until 60 years after an act making cruelty to animals an offence was passed, was an act passed making cruelty to children an offence. This law was passed in 1889.

It is time to re-examine our past efforts to prevent, identify and treat child abuse. It is time to figure out where we have gone wrong and once and for all put an end to the tragic accounts that temporarily jolt us from our newspapers or television sets before we file them away somewhere in the corner of our minds so that we do not have to think about them. The courts have assumed the position that parents are entitled to punish children