

*Child Abuse*

agencies, to promote research on the subject and, in our case, by providing expertise where we are best able, such as in the areas of policing, records management, information dissemination and so on.

It is obvious that most of the initiative must come from the provinces as well as the federal ministries more directly involved, such as Health and Welfare. Unfortunately, little coordinated effort is visible at the present time and it might just be our role to take a lead in focussing attention and effort on child abuse, and then gradually to phase ourselves out if the option of decriminalization is followed.

We might spend some time looking at the definition of child abuse. What exactly is meant by that term? The definitions of child abuse are legion. The problem is not helped by varying degrees of distinction made between physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. In medicine, child abuse is generally known by the term "maltreatment syndrome" or "silverman's syndrome", which is more all-inclusive than the definitions usually employed.

In a statement made before the United States Senate subcommittee hearings on senate bill 1191 in 1973, the bill known as the child abuse prevention act, Mr. Henry Kempe, a leading expert in the field, included all children receiving less than reasonable care and protection.

There are three components of child abuse—physical maltreatment, sexual exploitation, and failure to provide the necessities of life. Because the first two are generally manifested more luridly, there is a tendency for the other type of abuse to be less visible. Physicians frequently speak of a failure to thrive syndrome. Infants who suffer from it are malnourished and otherwise underdeveloped, not because of a failure to provide sufficient nourishment, but because the emotional climate of the environment interfered with development in ways which do not yet seem to be precisely understood.

The most complete definition which I have seen to date is that embodied in the child abuse prevention act, which I have referred to, and which decreed that the term "child abuse and neglect" means:

... the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of child under the age of 18 by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby.

What is the extent of the problem? It is impossible to get even a general idea as to the number and distribution of cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Reporting systems, which operate in only five provinces, have so many loopholes and are so inefficiently managed as to preclude obtaining valid statistics. In fact the only reputable statistics now available in Ontario are those of the chief coroner, Dr. H. B. Cotnam, which at least identify all those unfortunate children who died at their parents' hands.

Estimates of the number of incidents of child abuse in the United States vary widely, and some writers speculate that they may number in excess of 100,000 annually. In the preface to the second edition of their classic compendium on the subject, Kempe and Helfer note that:

Adequate demographic data which provide up-to-date evidence of the true incidence of significant child abuse in the United States are not available. Comparing current reporting of child abuse under state

laws, we find that many communities are running a rate of 375 reports of suspected abuse per million per year. No one has tried to compare the reported rate of suspected child abuse to the actual incidence.

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The development and refinement of mandatory reporting laws in every U.S. state has brought the reporting rate closer to the actual rate at a frightening speed. The report of the New York State Assembly Select Committee on Child Abuse of April, 1972, noted that there were some 400 reported cases of suspected child abuse in that state alone in 1966. By 1971 the annual total had climbed to 3,200. It was also noted that at least 1,000 American children died annually from causes attributed to child abuse and neglect.

In Canada, the only major work is by Mary Van Stolk, and she speculated that incidence rates and patterns in this country were likely similar to those in the United States, although she did take a slightly more conservative rate of 225 cases per million population.

The Nova Scotia study on child abuse tended to support Greenland's tentative position as it discovered only 59 cases in a year when Van Stolk predicted a possible 172.

Now there are many questions which can be asked and, as has been suggested, I think we should define more clearly who are the abusers, who are the abused; develop a pattern, and look into the results. We should examine the symptoms of child abuse. We should also find out what happens when a child has been abused, what happens when he goes to the hospital, and what happens when the matter is reported to the police, and so on.

I would like to end my remarks by suggesting some of the things which might be done. I stress that some of the examples which have come to my attention are quite horrifying. In general, suspected incidences of child abuse are treated by the hesitant, ineffective method described in the speech of the hon. member and mentioned by myself. In a very few serious cases where criminal acts are involved the penalty imposed in such proven cases does little for the child and little for the parent.

It is my feeling that a major effort will have to be made by all levels of government, acting with professionals in the fields of social work, medicine, education, and the criminal justice system, to develop new approaches in dealing with child abuse.

I suggest the following list of priority items be looked into: (a) the problem of child abuse must be placed squarely in the public eye as a first step in a massive public education program; (b) the entire question of the legal position of the child and, in particular, his right to protective services must be made the subject of a major study—this is currently being done in the United States; (c) the potential roles and functions of all professions, agencies and levels of government in eradicating child abuse must be analyzed and evaluated; (d) every effort must be made to increase communication and diffusion of knowledge among interested persons, particularly professionals, and assistance must be given to voluntary groups, such as Parents Anonymous; (e) a comprehensive review of federal and provincial legislation governing the provision of protective services to children and rehabilitative services to parents, with a view to providing new legisla-