

CHILD ABUSE

The following articles won for the author, Barbara Walton, the Australian Child and Family Welfare Journal award for journalism. The articles were published by the Shepparton News in a series of three articles in March, 1980. In June, 1980 it was announced that the Goulburn Valley branch of the Children's Protection Society had received a grant of \$32,000. It was considered that the articles by Barbara Walton had contributed to the movement to strengthen the Children's

Protection Society in the area.

Barbara Walton was a cadet journalist with the Shepparton News. She was presented with her award on International Children's Day in October, 1980. The judges were Dr. Don Edgar, Director of the Institute of Family Studies, Mr. Ken Hickey, representative of the Australian Journalists' Association and the Editor of Australian Child and Family Welfare.

The following are extracts from the articles written by Barbara Walton.

NOT CONFINED TO A FEW CATEGORIES

An abusive parent cannot be defined as one from a lower class of society as was once widely believed.

Maltreaters can be found in every socio-economic stratum of society.

Men and women, no matter how highly educated and from what background (although it has been proven parents who have been abused as children are more likely to maltreat their children) form the ranks of child abusers.

According to Chairman of the Mayor's Task Force of Child Abuse and Neglect in New York, Dr Vincent Fontana in his book "Somewhere A Child is Crying" there are six main categories in to which child abusers may generally be placed.

Emotionally Immature Parents:

The emotionally immature parent is one who has married before childhood has been outgrown and as such, is emotionally unprepared for the responsibilities and pressures of a parent.

Some of those who fall into this category resent their child for impeding their career or simply for arriving and forcing them into an adult role.

Emotional immaturity often results in a difficulty to relate and trust others. This can be traced to the parent who finds herself/himself unable to relate to his/her child.

There are also those who expect the child to support them emotionally and fill their needs. These are unrealistic expectations. When the child fails to do this the emotionally immature parent reacts in a violent and totally irrational manner.

Neurotic or Psychotic:

Parents in this category have personality problems which have led to insecurity and remoteness from reality.

These parents assume adult capabilities from their child or children.

According to Dr Fontana parents suffering personality disorders accuse their children of motives far beyond the capacity of the child, such as, "She's trying to destroy my marriage".

It is believed most of these parents have had a disturbed childhood.

The Mentally Deficient or Uninformed Parent:

Individuals suffering mental deficiency are not necessarily unloving or unsuccessful parents.

If they can be reached they are

capable of learning about child rearing and successfully practising it.

But in many cases, when the abusive parent is of borderline intelligence, it is difficult to decide how much maltreatment is due to their own inadequacies and how much to other factors.

In his book, Dr Fontana claims it is common for one child to be singled out in such a family. The child is often neglected, forgotten at tea time, his sores go untreated or he goes un-bathed and unclothed.

The child is generally different in some way from the rest of the family. Perhaps he is not quite as cute or maybe grumpy, mischievous or has some other trait rendering him different from the rest.

There are also those in this category who are near normal intelligence but are uninformed as to how a child should grow and develop.

They may have good intentions but their ignorance results in maltreatment, if the child deviates from the normal behaviour they, in their ignorance, expect.

Thus he may be placed in a boiling hot water bath, flung against a radiator or chained to a bed post in an effort to encourage him to develop 'normal behavior'.

Disciplinarians:

These parents are difficult to reach because of their contention they have the right to raise their child as they see fit.

In most cases the extreme disciplinarians follow the same principles they were raised on.

They are generally unbending, uncompromising people who believe they are doing the correct thing in order to make their children useful and respected citizens.

Criminal Sadistic:

In this category fall highly amoral people who abuse and kill for the sheer joy it brings them.

These parents have not provocation in order to lash out at the child, they are perverse, bizarre people who delight in abuse and infanticide.

Addicts:

Alcohol has long been associated with a percentage of child abusers.

The parent may himself be a quiet passive creature while removed from the influence of alcohol.

Innocent children suffer neglect, physical and mental abuse due to their parent's drunken stupors and the same often applies to the drug addict.

More often than not it is not bashing which leads to a child's ill health in this type of family, rather it is as a direct result of neglect.

And a child raised by addict parents stands a high chance of becoming an addict himself at a very early age, according to Dr Fontana.

It emerges clearly that the diversity of those labelled child abusers is great, and factors influencing a parent to abuse also vary, but several general characteristics can be attributed to the overall group.

Most child abusers cannot relate to people, and in particular their own children. They have a lack of understanding of the limitations and needs of children and are unable to cope with stress.

Abusing a child does not necessitate any physical maltreatment. Lack of parenting, of being protective and supportive and of offering love is in itself a serious form of abuse.

According to Doctor Fontana, there is sufficient clinical evidence to show

the absence of sustained parental affection can produce in an infant a state of unhappiness, insecurity and frustration.

The frightening result could be a re-enactment of the child's life on his or her children. . . a vicious forever con-

tinuing circle.

Over the years the maltreatment of children has steadily increased, despite our contention we are a progressive yet humanitarian people.

This is why action must be taken now.

PREVENTION OR CURE?

There is one universally recognised prevention of cruelty to children society, and its origins are rooted to the 1880s when a sad but comical court case took place.

At that time in America there was a Prevention of Cruelty to Animals society operating but no such society enforcing the rights and protection of children.

A concerned Governor's wife, a woman named Mary Ellen from New York, had come across a case of child abuse and in her desperation at meeting dead ends to have the child put into appropriate care, she wrapped the child in a horse blanket and went to court, arguing her case along the lines that human beings were animals as well.

She won the case, the first victory and stepping stone for the now fully established Children's Protection Society.

The Society is an independent organisation which began operating in America in 1896.

The society in Victoria was originally named the Victorian Society for the Protection of Children. About 10 years ago the name was altered to the Children's Protection Society.

Executive Director of the Children's Protection Society, Mr Geoffrey Woodfield said: "Child abuse is a problem which must be tackled more than it is. There is never any one cause for it, but rather a large number of causes."

Mr Woodfield has expressed his great wish to see a protection team set up in Shepparton.

The Children's Protection Society in Victoria is based in Melbourne and the society is aiming to establish teams in 18 centres throughout the state.

Full teams are beginning to be established in Geelong, Ballarat, Sale and Hamilton.

The society has only received government support of any predictable nature in the last 12 years.

In the 12 months ending June 30, 1979, there were 1018 referrals to teams in Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne coming from professional agencies, self referrals and other referrals.

Of these, 136 cases were taken to court, 81 of the cases had the children involved become wards of the state.

"The teams are basically investigators, who work with families experiencing difficulties with their children, leading to possible abuse," Mr Woodfield said.

Out of the 1018 referrals to the society, 314 were physical abuse cases, 321 due to neglect, 57 rejection and resulting emotional disturbance or abuse, 98 were because the mother was unable to cope, 53 were custody disputes, 27 disputes because of mental problems, alcohol or drug addiction, 24 because of sexual abuse, 48 behavior problems and 76 accommodation, support problems.

But Mr Woodfield impressed there are many causes for child abuse and, although there may be one prominent factor, there was always a number of reasons working together to produce the aggressive result.

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THE TWO GROUPS

In day to day dealings, many professionals working with children are witness to many possible maltreatment cases.

Such scenes are accelerating at a frightening pace.

Shepparton's two child maltreatment groups — the Case Consultancy Group and the Action Group have a number of professional members working towards reducing the high incidence.

The Child Maltreatment Case Consultancy Group offers a consultancy service to professional workers who want to refer a case for the purpose of clarifying practice issues, utilising the expertise of the consultant and shared responsibility in decision making.

They provide consultancy backing to people who are concerned about actual or suspected maltreatment.

As its name suggests, the group has a purely consultative function.

The Child Maltreatment Action Group aims to encourage the development of services which offer protection to children and provide support to families where maltreatment occurs or is suspected.

It has the task of community and professional education, developing resources and encouraging self referral.

A large part of the aim of the Action Group is to have established a Children's Protection Society Team in Shepparton to cover the Goulburn Valley.

WHO CAN THEY TURN TO?

Throughout the ages there have been many who have refused to conform to society's standards because they have seen them as senseless with no right to be or because the role they are placed in is too demanding they are unable to live up to it.

Society's refusal is seen everywhere — in mental institutions, prisons and crime, where people have rebelled against set standards and role placements.

Expectations are not always easily lived up to and one of the most burdened members of 20th century society who are expected to fulfil an unreal and demanding role are mothers.

Women with children are looked upon as the fully blossomed form of a female — expected to be continually understanding, always available, gentle, capable and forever loving.

And what mother wouldn't want to be? But as human beings we are all subject to moods, depressions and aggressions.

The sooner society gets rid of the aura of motherhood being synonymous to superhood, child abuse and its alarmingly high incidence all over the world can start to be effectively attacked and reduced.

Child abuse, maltreatment, battering, neglect — whatever you choose to call it is here, and all of its forms — physical, sexual, mental, emotional, educational, nutritional — and their derivatives must be faced now because only now is it beginning to make its mark as dramatically prevalent all over the world.

If the results of a report completed by the Royal Commission of Human Relations on child abuse (in which it was found that per 1000 population there is one case of child maltreatment) is transferred to the Goulburn Valley then it means there are about 140 cases of child maltreatment in this area every year.

Discount of course the unreported cases of all types of abuse including sexual, many of which are incest cases.

There is no doubt child abuse is a much bigger problem than can be assessed.

Figures are deceiving and so hard to come by, basically because the whole subject of child abuse is taboo and it is 'nobody's business'.

Overall figures reveal the main child maltreaters are their mothers — and not surprisingly since mother's role is largely in the home, with their children.

What could possibly drive a woman to maltreat her child?

Often maltreatment starts from birth as was the case of Janice and her son Ben who live in the Goulburn Valley.

Ben's birth was difficult and Janice was told and accepted the fact that he would be dead. When Ben was born alive and healthy, things began to go wrong.

From the beginning there was what seemed to be a personality clash, she remembers feeling nothing towards him as he lay in the humi-crib.

Factors such as isolation led to depression, screaming children and dirty nappies led to the situation's climax.

Janice felt there was no-one to turn to; no-one to understand who could help. She also felt great shame.

"I had the temptation to put my hand around his neck. . ." she stops.

"You don't know what it is like."

Although Janice has other children it is only Ben she has maltreated.

And it is quite common among families for one child to be separated out.

"I always felt I didn't deserve to be a mother", she said, "and afterwards I would always regret what I had done, but how can you tell someone that and expect them to understand?"

And this is where the tragedy lies. To fight child maltreatment society must change. To bring out the ugly head of child abuse members of the community must not condemn it in a negative way, they must understand the plight of the abuser and try and help by recognising potential cases and by throwing away the attitudes of scorn and isolation.

Such attitudes are feeding child maltreatment because instead of turning to another member of the community for understanding and help, mothers and other maltreaters who are finding they cannot cope are

receiving little understanding and a lot of shame as their aggressions continue.

Of course there are cases of maltreatment which deserve public scorn — they are brutal, purposeful and enjoyed — but most cases arise due to the inability to cope, most of them are mothers and most want to stop.

Janice now receives help from a family aid. For her "it is someone to talk to, it is knowing I am not the only one to do it". It is also having rests from the children, it is learning self control, knowing there are alternatives when the aggressive frustrated build up comes on.

"I know to think, 'don't lose your temper, put the kid in another room'."

The Department of Community Welfare Services is not turning a blind eye to the number of concerning child maltreatment cases in the region.

There are currently two groups based in Shepparton whose specific concern is child abuse.

They are the Child Maltreatment Case Consultancy Group and the Child Maltreatment Action group, formed from a group originally constituted in 1975 called the Child Maltreatment Referral Group.

The aim of the Child Maltreatment Case Consultancy Group is to provide consultancy backing to professional workers who are concerned about actual or suspected maltreatment they have come across in their work.

The Child Maltreatment Action Group has the task of community and professional education, developing resources and encouraging self referral.

The biggest and most important project for the Shepparton area is this group's attempts to have established a Children's Protection Society team.

Other than the police the Children's Protection Society is the only agency with authority to investigate and apprehend children after receiving a report of maltreatment.

Although the police are fully capable of their job, it is considered preferable to take an approach which looks at maltreatment as a social problem rather than a criminal offence.

At a meeting in August 1979, attended by members of two maltreatment groups and other interested welfare personnel from Benalla, Numurkah, Kyabram and Shepparton, Executive Director of the Children's Protection Society, Mr Geoffrey Woodfield indicated his agency's willingness to establish a service in this area.

The iron door standing in front of such progress is funds. The gradual establishment of a full team would begin with a Development Officer who would have full authority to investigate reports of maltreatment, help families take advantage of already existing services and, when necessary, apprehend a child for his or her protection.

The cost involved would be about \$20,000 per year, and the cause is one of the most vital in need of public support.

One child has died and another has been critically injured in this region in the last few years.

The Child Maltreatment Action Group does not have the funding for even one officer yet, but the group is already planning ahead when child abuse will receive the support it badly needs. . . when three Children's Protection Society workers and their backup will be a working reality in Shepparton.

EVERYBODY MUST BE RESPONSIBLE

Children have been subject to many forms of abuse throughout the ages.

The Greeks exposed their children on hillsides for extended periods of time and female circumcisions are still common among a number of Sudanese tribes, but most of this abuse is centuries old tradition, woven into a race's culture.

Are babies dunked in boiling water, bed wetters chained to their beds, little fingers held in open flames and forced onto hot burners and beatings with fists, electric cords, auto fan belts or starvation and deprivation of love and support part of our culture? Statistics suggest they are.

Children under three are the most vulnerable to maltreatment and numbers, although hard to fathom, are frighteningly high.

There are people who cannot understand how mothers, in particular, can physically or in any other way purposely injure their children.

The reasons are many and varied but certain common traits can be found.

Most parents who maltreat their children have been maltreated themselves, emotionally if not physically, and especially when under stress parents tend to revert to the methods of child rearing they themselves experienced.

This is a common occurrence even if they consciously reject these methods.

Almost all child maltreaters have low feelings of self worth, and many of them hold unreal expectations of their children. They look to the child to love them and meet their needs at an early age.

The potential for abuse is hard to recognise, but many people are aiming to prevent child maltreatment by attacking it before it happens.

A group formed by the Denver General Hospital in the US is for lonely, depressed mothers who are thought to be at risk of maltreating their children.

At group meetings they can talk to others who understand on a more personal level about the hassles of motherhood and child rearing — the

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depressions and difficulties. There is no bias or scorn, only understanding and hope.

Results have proven the danger of repeated injury to children is considerably lessened when the parent can form real and continued relationships with people.

Co-ordinator of the Goulburn Valley Region's Early Childhood Development Program, Mr Frank Purcell commented on the great concern ECDP workers felt over the high incidence of child abuse.

The ECDP is looking to strengthen the number and role of visiting child health nurses in this area.

Such nurses form lasting relationships particularly with mothers. They visit and act as not only medical advisors, but supports and aids in a more personal capacity.

Two of the child health visiting nurses are involved in the Child Maltreatment Action Group.

"We will be looking to the appointment of a Children's Protection Society worker as the first step in obtaining child maltreatment numbers in this area," Mr Purcell said.

At present there are no available details of the exact amount and nature of child maltreatment in this area.

But Mr Purcell said: "We see enough of it to know maltreatment is serious in this area."

The ECDP, among other services, is involved with Infant Welfare sisters, school medical people and visiting child health nurses — all of whom may witness child maltreatment cases and possible 'at risk' cases.

Mr Purcell spoke about bonding between mother and child.

Out of 200 cases handled in six months by the ECDP an estimated 10 per cent were experiencing bonding problems between parent and child.

Many of these may be potential maltreatment cases.

There is growing concern about the importance of bonding between parents and their offspring.

Hospitals are now making sure initial contact is made between mother and child by having babies in the room beside the mother and allowing fathers to be present at the birth of their child.

Isolation, a variety of environmental factors, financial pressures, general status and support from family and friends, childhood experiences (it has been proven parents who have been abused in their youth are more likely to be abusers), stress and bonding are all factors which may fluctuate to influence parents to maltreat their children, or other children.

Parents may perceive their child or one of their children as 'different' which can lead to abuse and if a person is unstable and unable to cope under stress it makes the potential for abuse closer to a reality.

Inequality, competition, alienation; where chances for people to achieve their inherent potential is thwarted by lack of money, or second class citizenship are also leading factors to child maltreatment.

And it must be remembered, not all persons have the capacity for parenting. . . the widespread belief mothering is universally present in all women is over-rated, untrue and dangerous.

People working in welfare fields are attempting to recognise and fight 'at risk' cases before they move a step further.

Consider the case of a single or married woman, living in a high rise flat, depressed, lonely and virtually illiterate.

The remedy is often easy — simple games or handwork, discussions about handling children, demonstrations, groups providing the end to isolation and activities, the end of boredom and depression.

And such people can be helped by everyone — their neighbours, friends, family or complete strangers who care and are knowledgeable enough to recognise a mother or other person 'at risk'.

It has been recognised those who require special support are mothers, who during their pregnancy express violent aversion to the idea of breast feeding, who are upset or even distraught at being pregnant.

The apparent visiting performance of the parents of the premature or sick baby or the sick older child in hospital provide important clues as to the infant parent relationship.

It can provide clues and signals for

close supportive back up work.

Single mothers assistance should not only be financial but in real more personal, active terms. They form many potential child abusers and need greater support.

It has been said: "We have got the knowledge, we now need the commitment on a national scale."

It is the most relevant comment I have yet heard about reducing child maltreatment throughout the world.

A large factor keeping child maltreatment under a dust cover is the air of taboo which still lingers around it. People are hesitant to report any case they may suspect or know of, because it is 'none of their business', or involves the police and they see an endless succession of court, scandal and trouble to their name.

But all these are fantasies. It is rare for abusing parents to explicitly present themselves for help, so if you know or suspect anyone who has been abused it is basically a humane and natural act on the part of abuser and the abused — to notify the authorities.

You don't have to leave your name or address.

In NSW it is compulsory to notify an appropriate source if you witness, hear or suspect child maltreatment.

The pros and cons to compulsory notification are many but the number of cases reported did not increase in the following six months by 50.

Compulsory notification may not be appealing to many but if it can save a case like that of Gregory T then it is worth it.

Gregory T was admitted to the Royal Children's Hospital in 1958 four times.

The first time he had a fractured femur he "tripped".

The second time anaemia and fractures, malnutrition and frostbite, the third time total blindness, it was assumed due to horrific shaking of the head and shoulders and the final admission. . . moribund with an intracranial haemorrhage, dying soon after admission.

He was 18 months old, the result of a schizophrenic mother and inadequate hand wringing, cap screwing father.

In Sweden today, it is against the law for Swedish parents to spank their children — the result of much controversy on the subject of maltreatment in the country and the belief that children are society's most oppressed majority.

MOST UNREPORTED CRIME

In Sydney recently I witnessed the sexual abuse of a young child.

It was on film and called "The Rape Of A Schoolgirl" and left nothing to the imagination.

The girl was small and young and lay, hands bound, while a variety of sexually perverted acts were performed upon her.

Whether or not this girl, or the hundreds of others involved in such films, consented to appear in the production is beside the point.

There is no possible argument supporting 10 year old children, like the one I saw, being the stars of such foul and sickening movies.

But child pornography is thriving.

Each year the number of Australian children being abused and exploited in pornographic material — some of it on an organised level — is increasing.

And child prostitutes are not rare.

There have been many known (and undoubtedly more unknown) systematic seductions of children, often by the use of drugs, into prostitution.

Police confirm that child molesters carry out skilled patient and determined seductions of their victims.

If you have any doubt about child prostitution and the abuse of children in pornographic material travel to Sydney's King's Cross and sit and watch the baby prostitutes on their beats.

The sobering fact that child prostitution, child pornography and drugs invariably go hand in hand is visible to any passer by.

Social investigator, Lloyd Martin, an American police expert on child sex abuse cases said, during a recent working visit to Australia:

"Every one of the kids you see in a pornographic photograph have been sexually abused."

And Australia is definitely not without its own pornographic, prostituted, drug addict child population.

A school for child molesters, where organised classes were held regularly; where men with an admitted sexual interest in children could learn the latest seduction methods, usually presented in imported manuals from the United States was uncovered in Australia.

Not all child prostitutes are females — males are just as much in demand.

And apart from pornography and prostitution of children there is the threat to every child of sexual abuse.

Florida's youngest rape victim was two months old, and cases of children, as young as five years old have been reported as subjects of sexual abuse — often incest.

Superintendent of the Allambie Child Reception in Melbourne, Mr Roy Willich estimates there could be 20,000 cases of child sexual abuse every year in Australia (Melbourne Age May 1979).

Mr Willich author of a number of books on child maltreatment including "The Troubled Ones" containing a number of case studies of children who have been sexually abused is specifically concerned with child sexual abuse.

Mr Willich estimates about 3000 cases each year are incest cases between father and daughter but he doubts if 30 cases of father-daughter incest come to official notice each year.

Incest is the most prevalent and certainly the most concealed form of sexual abuse which remains surrounded by an aura of total taboo and social stigma.

At Long Beach in California it was found, 90 per cent of mothers seeking help at a shelter for physically abused families had been sexually exploited as children.

There is great pressure from the community to ignore, minimise or cover up the situation of sexual abuse, especially if it occurs within the family.

Family shame often over-rides the act of incest, so it continues on and is

kept a secret or often, completely ignored.

Incest is perhaps the saddest of all forms because of the predicament the child is put in. It has been shown there is a very deep conflict of loyalties operating within the child.

He or she feels guilt, fear, shame and confusion, often as to whether what is happening is right or wrong.

Emotional blackmail is common — the abuser telling the child it is normal to happen, or if the child does not comply with his wishes she is threatened with death or to be sent away to a home for bad children or something similar.

A sexual encounter with a parent may be the only form of love the child received from the parent, so while not enjoying it the child remains complacent for the positive attention.

Home is meant to be where children learn the skills, morals and rights and wrongs of the world. It is where they take example to grow into mature adults, and there is no doubt the family and the home have a great influence on the outcome of the individual.

Imagine the disruption and confusion a child experiences when incest takes place, especially as is often the case when the mother pretends it doesn't exist, basically to avoid having to face it.

As with child abuse, those who have been sexually exploited when they were young or witnessed such abuse are more likely to be adult abusers.

And that it has been proven children are more likely to be abused by members of their family than strangers is horrifying.

Child sexual abuse has been named the most unreported crime.

It takes a very strong child to stand up and say stop it, to survive the trauma of police investigation usually alienated from both members of his/her family, then to go through court procedure, testifying and repeating experiences which are best forgotten.

It can be seen how much easier it may appear to a muddled child (remember we are talking about children from about 8 to 16) to let the incest go on.

Perhaps we should be working