
family



JERRY CAMMARATA
FATHERS DIARY

Society can help abusive parents

Is the sexual abuse of children a phenomenon of current times? Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding no. From the time men began living in communities, sexual abuse of children was a common practice, as evidenced by cuneiform writings on clay tablets and even the Bible.

Innocent children, especially girls, are still having their psychosexual development manipulated and even destroyed. The startling incidence of sexual abuse of children today is recorded by Florence Rush, a psychiatric social worker in "The Best Kept Secret — Sexual Abuse of Children" (McGraw-Hill 1981). As many as 25 million females in United States this year will have sex with an adult male before she is 13, according to Ms. Rush. New York City, for example, had a 27.2 percent victim rate under 14 years old in 1975.

In the last two decades, the women's movement has drawn more attention to harm done by sexual assault.

In a report entitled "Sexual Assault: The Target is You," from the Hemepin County Attorney's Office of Minneapolis, fathers

were found to have little understanding of the harm they inflicted on their children through sexually abusive behavior. Some denied they were abusive. Many had no idea their actions were punishable by law.

Without counseling and guidance, and a concerted effort by both parents, the family and the church, the abused children will probably be incapable of forming meaningful relationships in the future.

Help is available for every type of sexual abuse case. Under grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, Parents Anonymous has established 900 chapters around the country. Call 1-800-421-0353, the hotline number, for immediate assistance or write to Parents Anonymous, 22330 Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 208, Torrance, Calif. 90505. Remember, anonymous help means just that — anonymous.

Attitudes and behavior *can* be changed through understanding, education and counseling. Abusive parents *can* become productive, loved and respected members of their families.