

Even after separation

Suffering lingers on for child abuse victims

Victims of child abuse often face difficult times, even after being removed from abusive families, says a University of Michigan group which is helping Michigan communities and agencies become better equipped to handle such cases.

In addition to the trauma of foster home placement, abused and neglected children — as well as their natural families — must cope with a tangle of social and legal agencies whose actions often appear to lack clear purpose and direction, say lawyer Donald Duquette and social worker Kathleen Coulborn Fallier of the U-M's Interdisciplinary Project on Child Abuse and Neglect (IPCAN).

The traditional way of handling of child abuse cases by available community agencies — including schools, police, substance abuse and mental health centers, juvenile courts and hospitals — may create "duplication or gaps in service, and sometimes a situation where different agencies work in opposition to one another," says Fallier.

"Usually there is no feedback to the initial referral agency, and very little communication among different professionals working on a case."

To help achieve greater coordination in these cases, the U-M child abuse specialists have trained "multidisciplinary teams" of professionals — including physicians, lawyers, social workers, police officers, nurses and judges — from 10 Michigan communities over the past year. Some 97 professionals have been trained at the U-M, and "these 97 will in turn train about 1,000 professionals in the 10 communities," say IPCAN staff.

"MICHIGAN'S Child Protection Law of 1975 requires the state department of Social Services to establish multidisciplinary teams throughout the state and to train agency and court personnel."

The community teams trained by the U-M's interdisciplinary project will help organize and coordinate services for children in each county, assist the Department of Social Services on specific cases of child abuse and neglect, and provide training to other community professionals," according to Fallier and Duquette.

In Michigan, more than 32,000 child abuse cases — including actual physical harm, sexual maltreatment, emotional abuse or neglect, and educational and medical neglect — are handled by Child Protective Services each year, "but these cases represent only the tip of an iceberg when one considers the many unreported cases," according to Duquette.

One national study estimated that some 14 percent of all children aged 3 to 17 are abused each year, including some 6.5 million reported cases, says Duquette, noting that the figures are increasing each year.

Citing some of the difficulties of dealing with child abuse cases without interagency cooperation, Duquette and Fallier note the "job burnout" rate of Child Protective Services caseworkers is high because of the stresses of the job.

Without the availability of advice from professional social workers, lawyers and physicians, the caseworkers are more likely to "intervene" by removing the child from his natural home, rather than seeking resolution to the problems within the existing family unit, according to the U-M specialists.

"BUT SUCH a move should not be made hastily," warns Fallier. "The decision to place a child in a foster care facility will mean a traumatic adjustment for the child, with lifelong repercussions."

In some cities, removal of the child from his natural home is often followed by cumbersome legal procedures and court adjournments which cause some parents to give up their quest to have their child returned, says Duquette.

At Wayne County Juvenile Court — where the interdisciplinary U-M team has been attempting to apply their expertise in child abuse cases — previous court decisions have leaned heavily in favor of removing the child from the natural home, according to Duquette.

Such removal is ordered in some 50 percent of suspected child abuse cases in Wayne County, compared to a national average of 10 percent, he says.

As part of the U-M training programs, Fallier, Duquette and Leslie Hoover, a nursing instructor from the Department of Pediatrics and Human Development at Michigan State University, made initial visits to selected areas of the state to determine community needs in child abuse cases.

Countries included in the training projects were Marquette, Ogemaw, Monroe, Genesee, Oakland, Kalamazoo, Ottawa, Muskegon, Jackson, and the Traverse area cluster of Grand Traverse, Benzie, Antrim, Kalkaska, and Ionia counties.

The U-M program, including training in specific disciplines as well as instruction in interdisciplinary management of child abuse cases, strives for cost efficiency: "The IPCAN multi-disciplinary team training encourages a model of community organization which does not rely on a large infusion of new dollars to improve services. Instead, various public and private organizations — hospitals, social and public health agencies, and the Department of Social Services — contribute staff time and other resources for multi-disciplinary team activity," accord-

ing to Duquette and Fallier.

ONE MAJOR obstacle to an interdisciplinary approach in child abuse cases has been confidentiality requirements of professionals. But Duquette stresses that, under the state's 1975 Child Protection Law, such confidentiality is waived for treatment personnel dealing with child abuse cases.

Generally, says Duquette, consultation among different professionals is permitted in suspected child abuse cases

"for purposes of providing service to a child or family and if each professional is bound by the same requirements of confidentiality."

The U-M training projects, financed by Title XX training funds from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and administered by the State Department of Social Services, are free to participating communities.

The University's interdisciplinary program in child abuse and neglect was initiated in 1976 with a grant from the

Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation of Ann Arbor.

It provides training for U-M students from the School of Social Work, Medical School and Law School, and also includes a clinical law program in which law students represent clients in child abuse cases.

In conjunction with the program to train community professionals, the U-M has developed written materials for lawyers, physicians, nurses, social workers and mental health profes-

sional. Films, videotapes and slides were also made available to the trainees.

Further information on the program is available from the University of Michigan Interdisciplinary Program on Child Abuse and Neglect, Social Work Center Building, 1015 E. Huron, Ann Arbor, 48109.

Among other aspects of the program: U-M training faculty members are providing multidisciplinary team services to the Protective Services staff at the Taylor office of the Wayne County

Department of Social Services, as part of a "demonstration" project. U-M social work graduate students also receive training as part of this program.

Faculty from the U-M's IPCAN have provided consultation in the development and implementation of Michigan's Child Protection Law.

During 1978 some 400 Child Protective Service workers received legal training from U-M faculty.



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