

Factors abound in finding cause for child abuse

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

It's difficult to point to any one cause for child abuse and neglect. "But the symptoms are plentiful," said officer Sandie Rochford of the Farmington Hills Police Department's juvenile section.

Marital problems, occupational stress (particularly in two-income families), financial difficulties and lack of parental education can prompt the frustration and anger that often lead to abuse and neglect, Rochford said.

"A lot of times, the female is the perpetrator... often single parents," she said.

Statistically, most victims of child abuse and neglect are 5 years old or younger. "They cry a lot. They can't communicate and they do things that are frustrating," Rochford said.

Adults that work with children are required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect. They include teachers, physicians, dentists, police, social workers, medical examiners and child-care providers. "Citizens have a moral responsibility to report abuse," she said.

STILL, MANY are confused about what they are, witnessing or what they suspect is happening to a child. "All I need is a phone call."

"Before, it was either ignored or not talked about. It was embarrassing to the family. But people are more aware now that it must be talked about," Farmington Public Services Director Frank Lauboff said.

If through investigation it's determined a child is abused or neglected, the family can be helped and further abuse prevented, Rochford said.

The most obvious signs of abuse are injuries, particularly repeat injuries. Often to cover the injuries, inappropriate clothing will be worn, such as long sleeves and pants during hot weather.

"Another sign is the child who wants to assume the blame for what appears to be an abusive-type injury," Rochford said.

OTHER TELLTALE signs that a child is being abused or neglected include:

- Extreme behavior, either overly passive or aggressive. This also includes a drastic change in behavior such as thumb sucking or bed-wetting that wasn't part of the child's previous behavior.
- An unusual amount of fear in the child toward a parent.
- A short attention span or learning problem in school that can't be diagnosed.
- Unsociability of the child or the



RANDY BORST/Staff Photographer

Farmington Hills officer Sandie Rochford is assigned to investigating juvenile-related complaints.

family. Often, parents' expectations of their children will provide a foundation for trouble. Parents often have ideas of what and how they want their children to be. "Kids don't always fit into that pattern," Rochford said.

Increasingly, the fast-paced lifestyle of two working parents or single parents involved in their own worlds prompts trouble. Parents who work all day return home to the frustration of raising children with their own unique problems, Rochford said.

Many parents who don't intend to hurt their child are carried away with their own anger and frustration. "Be wary when you spank your child in anger. You may get out of control," said Meg Mittel, Oakland County's Child Abuse and Neglect Council executive director.

Calls fight abuse tragedy

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Both Rochford and Meg Mittel, Oakland County's Child Abuse and Neglect Council executive director, caution that statistics only reflect reported cases.

"Some experts agree these are just a fraction of what exists," Mittel said.

The problem is that those who are abusing certainly aren't calling police and, in far too many cases, those who witness or suspect abuse aren't calling either, Rochford said.

"It's really an under-reported crime," she said. "Generally because it's committed by family members, it's so hard to get it reported."

UNDER STATE Child Protection Laws, anonymity for those who call with information on abuse or neglect is ensured.

"Hopefully, by educating the public, we'll get more people reporting their observations," Rochford said. "If people ever have questions, doubts or suspicions, they can just call up here. Sometimes, people don't know what they're seeing."

Abuse and neglect aren't just the serious and often well-publicized cases of injury, maiming and sometimes death. Abuse and neglect include leaving a child unattended in a car and dressing him or her improperly for the weather.

FOR THOSE who might believe that child abuse and neglect can't happen in an upwardly mobile community such as Farmington Hills, they're kidding themselves.

"Abuse knows no bounds of economics or education," Rochford said. "Yes, the upper end has a better ability to conceal the problem. A lot of times, they can seek out their own treatment for their own problems."

Prosecution does occur but isn't always the ultimate goal of police in abuse and neglect cases. Rochford secures help for the family from the Protective Services Division of the state Department of Social Services. The division offers counseling and referrals to other community agencies.

Reports of suspected abuse or neglect and requests for information can be made by calling either Rochford at 473-9667 or the Protective Services Division in Walled Lake at 624-8800.

Protective services also offers a 24-hour hot line, 955-1599.

Farmington Public Schools

millage renewal election, Tuesday, Feb. 9, 1988

Precincts:	Yes	No
1. Farmington Training Center	172	60
2. O.E. Dunckel Middle School	191	98
3. Warner Middle School	109	50
4. East Middle School	124	78
5. Absentee Votes	39	33
Totals	635	318

Registered voters, 49,468; actual number of voters, 968; turnout percentage, 1.95. Fifteen ballots spoiled. Vote counts are unofficial.

Schools' voters back tax renewal proposal

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facility usage plan is slated for the regular school board meeting March 1.

Predictably, the largest numbers of votes came from Precincts 1 and 2 at Farmington Training Center and O.E. Dunckel Middle School, which cover most of the area between Orchard Lake and Haggerty roads, and 14 Mile and Eight Mile. Votes totaled 232 and 287 respectively. The smaller Precinct 4 at East Middle School had 293 votes and absentee votes totaled 72.

The closest contest came with ab-

Tuesday's results follow the trend in Farmington school millage elections over the years; voters have never defeated a millage renewal effort.

sentee voters, who cast 39 ballots in favor and 33 against the millage renewal.

Despite Tuesday's low turnout, the number of voters was up slightly

from last year, when a 4-mill operating renewal was approved by little more than 1 percent of the 57,979 registered voters.

The number of registered voters in this election was down significantly, about 10,000 since the last school election. The Farmington Hills clerk's office reviewed their records and recently placed these voters in an "inactive" file because they have not been active for the past four years.

According to Howard Altman of the Oakland County Elections Division, this review and "purging" of election records is required by law each December. These inactive voters are kept on file for another six years when their names will be removed if not reactivated before that time.

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