

Local group assists mothers of molest victims

By Sean Nelson
Emerald Contributor

One local organization holds support group meetings for an often misunderstood segment of society: the mothers of molested children.

Mothers Opposed to Molest Situations originally was started in Eugene three years ago, according to Joan Simmons, vice-chairwoman and co-facilitator of the group.

"It was incorporated a year ago in February by mothers who were involved with the State of

Oregon Children's Services Division," Simmons said.

"Most often molesters can be members of the family: fathers, uncles, brothers and grandfathers," Simmons said. They also can be some women and any family member who has the potential," she added.

Molesters do not necessarily look like "dirty old men," Simmons said. "Frequently they appear to be nice people in other areas of their lives."

"Often they are good citizens who work, go to church and pay their bills. Often the molest is the only crime that these offenders commit," Simmons said.

"Molesters are not strangers. Ninety-two percent of molesters are known to the victim," she said. "And 50 percent are family members."

According to Simmons, statistics indicate one out of three girls is molested before the age of 18, and one out of seven boys is molested before the age of 18.

"Those are just reported incidents," Simmons said. The actual numbers are unknown, she said.

"Our organization is oriented to the recovery of mothers of victims. What we try to focus on is helping mothers become more able to protect their children against molesters," Simmons said.

In addition, treatment is designed to teach victims, mothers of victims, and other family members how to recognize signs and symptoms of molest in their own families and in other families; how to recognize an offender's thinking; how to recognize offender

behavior; how to teach assertiveness skills for mothers; how to find ways of dealing with guilt; and how to handle children who have been molested and how to raise them, Simmons said.

"It's common for everyone involved to blame mothers," Simmons said. "It's common for many families to expect the mother to be the caretaker of the family, or the person who takes care of everyone and everything."

"Mothers themselves buy into that," Simmons said.

"Another big issue is to teach mothers how to take care of themselves," Simmons said. "It's something that they have to learn to do." Many years pass by before mothers experience the serious effects of that kind of self-neglect, Simmons said. "Depression is common among mothers of victims," she added.

The focus on treatment of offenders and victims is very important, Simmons said. Equally important is the mother's treatment. "Often the healing of the child is affected directly by the mother and the kind of environment she is able to provide," she said.

"Guilt and depression are the most common problems for mothers. Many families don't face facts until the children are adults," Simmons said.

Children who have been molested often are angry, and this anger may fester over a long period of time, Simmons said. "When the victim doesn't even admit that the anger is there it can control them," she added.

Sometimes the victim's anger is directed toward the wrong person, such as the mother or a

sibling, Simmons said. "Really it belongs with the molester and what happened," she added.

Common problems are depression, self-destructive acts such as drug or alcohol problems, and relationship problems, she said. "By the time the therapy is over, the mother is the only one around to deal with the long-term effects in the family," Simmons said. "That's why it's important for the mother to have worked through her own problems so that she can be helpful to the family."

"Mothers can be a powerful force in the recovery of all family members," Simmons said.

"Victims find it extremely difficult to disclose molest," she said. They are afraid of real, threatened or imagined consequences, she added.

"In many incidents of molest there is a bond between the offender and the child that he or she doesn't want to disrupt. That's the tragedy... the child feels an actual love for that person who has abused their power."

Children don't want to break up the family, she said.

It's common for victims to be told or to believe that the mother couldn't handle this, and that she might fall apart or have a nervous breakdown as a result of disclosure, she said.

"Children are very protective of everybody, including the mother and the offender," Simmons said.

Mothers of molested children may call for an intake appointment. Group meetings are held on Wednesday evenings. Another group begins meeting October 1, Simmons added.

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National association combats MS

By Stephanie Greenwood
Emerald Contributor

Last year, college students on 175 campuses joined together in a national program and raised money for people with multiple sclerosis.

Coordinators of Students Against Multiple Sclerosis expect even more students to get involved this year. SAMS organizations are targeted at certain universities, including the University and Oregon State University.

The Kappa Delta Rho fraternity at OSU raised about \$2,000 last year during the "Bust MS Month" through balloon launches and the sale of T-shirts and

buttons.

At the University however, students currently are not involved with SAMS "because no one responded to the announcements," said Mary Holman, who is the executive director of the Oregon chapter.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease of nerve tissue that most commonly occurs in people around the ages of 20-40 years old.

According to Dr. James Jackson of the University's Student Health Center, tissue hardens until it forms plaques in the brain or spinal cord and eventually disrupts the alignment of the nerves. The result is partial or complete paralysis.

"No one knows for sure exactly what causes it, but there are a few hypotheses," he said.

Throughout the 1987-88 academic year, and especially

in February, students will be joining together during "Bust MS Month" to provide educational activities and to organize fundraisers.

Sixty percent of the money raised is retained by the chapter to assist people with MS. Forty percent of the funds is remitted to the national society for research and related programs.

SAMS fundraisers include "Rock Alike," a lip sync competition in which students impersonate their favorite rock stars. The top regional impersonators appear in a national contest broadcast on MTV. Other SAMS fund-raising activities include dance-a-thons and movie parties.

Fraternities, sororities or individuals can join SAMS by contacting Holman at 1-800-422-3042.

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