

Close to Home...

Mary Ann Cerullo

Incest — a dirty word

Incest has been taboo in all ages and cultures. But so much shame attaches to this abhorrent crime that society has drawn a veil of secrecy around it. This silence has served both to protect the offender and to conceal the victim.

As recently as 15 years ago, experts claimed that incest - broadly defined as sexually arousing physical contact between family members who are not married - occurred in only one out of a million families. Now some professionals believe the actual incidence could be as high as one in a hundred.

In most states, incest is still a crime, with penalties that range from 90 days to life imprisonment. But a man who commits incest (90 percent of all reported cases involve father, or father figure, and daughter) is rarely convicted since there is usually little physical evidence of abuse, no eye witnesses, and the credibility of children is often questioned in court.

This shameful crime, incest, has been one of our most under-reported crimes, but when I asked the Morrow County district attorney's office last March, "What is the number one juvenile problem in the county?" the answer was physical and sexual abuse.

Said Carolyn Holt, Juvenile Services director, "We need to educate the people that these things are happening right here."

From October 1980 to March 1981, the district attorney's office handled a dozen cases for prosecution concerning sexually molested children within the ages of seven to 12.

The Juvenile Services Division handled 10 cases in 1980. Seven children out of the ten became wards of the court. Their ages ranged from six to 15.

Dr. Terry Templeman of the Mental Health Division reports eight incest cases within the county in May 1981. Six were said to be in the north end.

According to Carolyn Holt, the north end has more abuse cases than in South Morrow because of high unemployment in the Boardman-Irrigon area.

But at the same time, Ann Spicer, district attorney, says, "Maybe a fourth of the abuse crimes are reported, which is only scratching the surface...only 1 in 4 to 1 in 10 sexual abuse crimes are reported."

The most common result of abuse within the home is juvenile runaways, Ann Spicer stated further. In 1980, Morrow County counted 37 runaways.

Dr. Shirley Anderson of Harborview Medical Center in Seattle says, "For too long, victims have felt betrayed, shamed and rejected. So they kept silent - and remained victims...Don't hide it! You are not alone and you can be helped."

But sexual abuse isn't just a crime of the city. It occurs in all communities, large and small, even in Morrow County, as Ann Spicer, Carolyn Holt, and Dr. Templeman have pointed out.

As Ann Spicer recently stressed, "We should be open with our children - and encourage people to report sexual or physical abuse crimes...It's the reporting of these crimes that keeps the potential abusers from committing the crime."

And Caroline Holt says to young people, "Don't be afraid to come in and talk. You will be protected...We will do everything in our power to work with your parents to solve the problem."

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3. Just match the pictures of the people above (you need not know their names) with their place of business or work shown below
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5. Two winners will be drawn each week and announced in the Gazette-Times
6. The first two correct entries drawn will each win a \$25 gift certificate to designated stores that week
7. In the event of no winners one week prizes will be added to next week's contest
8. Winners are eligible to enter in following week's contests
9. Deadline for entries is 5 p.m. the Monday of each week

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