

60,000 Beaten

Child Abuse On Rise In U.S.

Michael S., 18 months old, died not long ago in a Chicago hospital of multiple fractures and massive bruises.

He died because his father, Steve, 18, had hanged him by the wrists with electrical cord and then slammed the baby against the wall for nearly 30 minutes.

News Analysis

Steve was enraged because Michael had torn a pop-art psychedelic poster that decorated the apartment.

The case of baby Michael is not exceptional.

Every week, all across the nation, hundreds of other small children are beaten, slashed, scalded, burned with cigarette stubs, tortured with electrical shocks. Some are burned over open flames, gas burners and cigarette lighters; some are suffocated with pillows or plastic bags; some are strangled; some are drowned.

According to reliable estimates, 60,000 American children are reported each year to the authorities as requiring protection from parental beatings, cruelty, or neglect.

Tragically, some 700 or 800 of these defenseless children succumb to such abuse.

Child beating has long been one of the standard horrors of hospital emergency rooms, but now the crime is on the increase in many parts of the country.

In New York City for example, the incidence of reported child abuse went up 540 per cent between 1966 and 1970, and rose again in 1971, when 7,000 cases of child beating were reported.

Part of the city's soaring increase in reports of abuse can be attributed to a 1964 state law, requiring doctors, nurses, hospital social service personnel and school officials to report cases of child abuse and neglect.

But experts agree that two new factors are contributing to the

nationwide rise in the crime. These are drug-addicted parents and those who marry while scarcely more than children themselves.

The experts also agree that statistics in New York and elsewhere represent only the tip of the iceberg, chiefly because so many cases of child abuse go unreported.

Can anything be done on a national scale to solve, or at least mitigate, this horror?

Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth, believes so, and is leading a determined attack on the problem.

He has introduced a Senate bill aimed at eliminating what he calls the "tragic and perplexing problem of child abuse."

In Senate hearings at the end of last March, he called national attention to the need for an all-out federal effort on behalf of America's children, who, he points out, are vulnerable and defenseless.

Sen. Mondale's proposal would establish a national center on child abuse and neglect, provide demonstration grants to train people to deal with the problem, and set up a national commission to assess the effectiveness of existing laws on child abuse and neglect.

Senate outlook for passage is said to be good. A source close to Sen. Mondale said: "It doesn't take much to convince people on this issue." Senate action is likely sometime this summer. House action is not expected until later.

Fortunately, ongoing research aimed at curbing the crime of child battering seems now to be showing signs of promise.

The key to the new therapies is a profile of the child-battering parents that shows them not as criminals but rather as persons desperately in need of medical help.

There is general agreement that parents who abuse, batter, or neglect their children were

themselves almost always abused or beaten as children.

Such parents, says James Walsh of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, were never given "good parentage" themselves. "They grew up in a hostile environment and were abused themselves."

The result of this traumatic rearing is often parents who have low self-esteem and seek constant assurance from those around them — including their children. "They want their children to be parents to them in a kind of role reversal," Mr. Walsh says.

And when the children fail to satisfy their parents' emotional needs, he explains, the parents react with the same violence they experienced as children.

At the same time, when confronted with authority, these parents expect that they will be abused, attacked and charged with being "bad" parents, according to Helen Alexander of the University of Colorado Medical Center.

For this reason, the aim of much of the new therapy is to reassure the parents and gradually convince them of their worth.

"We have to rescue the family, not only the child," says John Hagenbuch of the Massachusetts Department of Family and Children Services. "The parents are always isolated and feel they have no one to talk to. We counsel them and try to bring the child back into a household that will be able to demonstrate its love for the child as a child, and not a surrogate adult... against whom, the parent might have struck out."

Such an approach has been developed at the University of Colorado Medical Center over the past three years. It involves the use of "parent-aides" who can exercise empathy toward the parents of battered children.

The aides' function is chiefly to act as guardians for the parents; they visit the families often, pay little attention to the children,



Child recovers in hospital... [RNS]

but listen with interest to the problems of the parents.

Another promising approach is the self-help organization modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous. The original organization of this type — Mothers Anonymous (MA) — was started in Los Angeles in 1970.

MA and a newer group — Parents Anonymous (PA) — in New York City have been welcomed by experts. Declares Dr. C. Henry Kempe of the University of Colorado Medical Center, "People who have trouble 'parenting' kids are often very

reluctant to accept help from professionals for many personal reasons."

Meanwhile, voices are being raised to demand a "bill of rights for children."

In broad terms at present, says William Aikman of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, "the child's legal status is an amalgam of non-citizen, slave, overprotected pet, and valuable chattel."

Says Prof. Sanford N. Katz of the Boston College Law School: "It is in the home that a child's rights are least protected."

TV Talk Show to Feature Five Diocesan Figures

"Where the Church Leaders are Leading Us," will be the subject of the Wyoma Best television program June 4-8, at 1 p.m.

Wyoma Best says that her interest in highlighting the Church in Rochester is derived from the many projects it sponsors in the community.

The week's series of shows is part of a special look at particular groups in Rochester. "The level of involvement in the Church and the new activities and scope of the Church seem to be of such importance I wanted to focus on them," said the hostess of WHEC-TV's "Today in Rochester."

The program for the week is:

Monday, June 4, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan will speak on the topic, Renewed Church of Rochester.

Tuesday, June 5, Father Charles Mulligan, director of the Office of Human Development, will discuss The Church's Role in Community Service.

Wednesday, June 6, the guest will be Sister James Lynch, SSJ, assistant vicar of education and the topic, Church and Education.

Thursday, June 7, Father Stanley Farier, SVD, pastor of St. Lucy's, will discuss Minority Representation in the Catholic Church.

Friday, June 8, the guest will be Father Louis Hohman, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul, Churchville, and the topic, Old Church vs. New.

Mindszenty Visit Still Uncertain

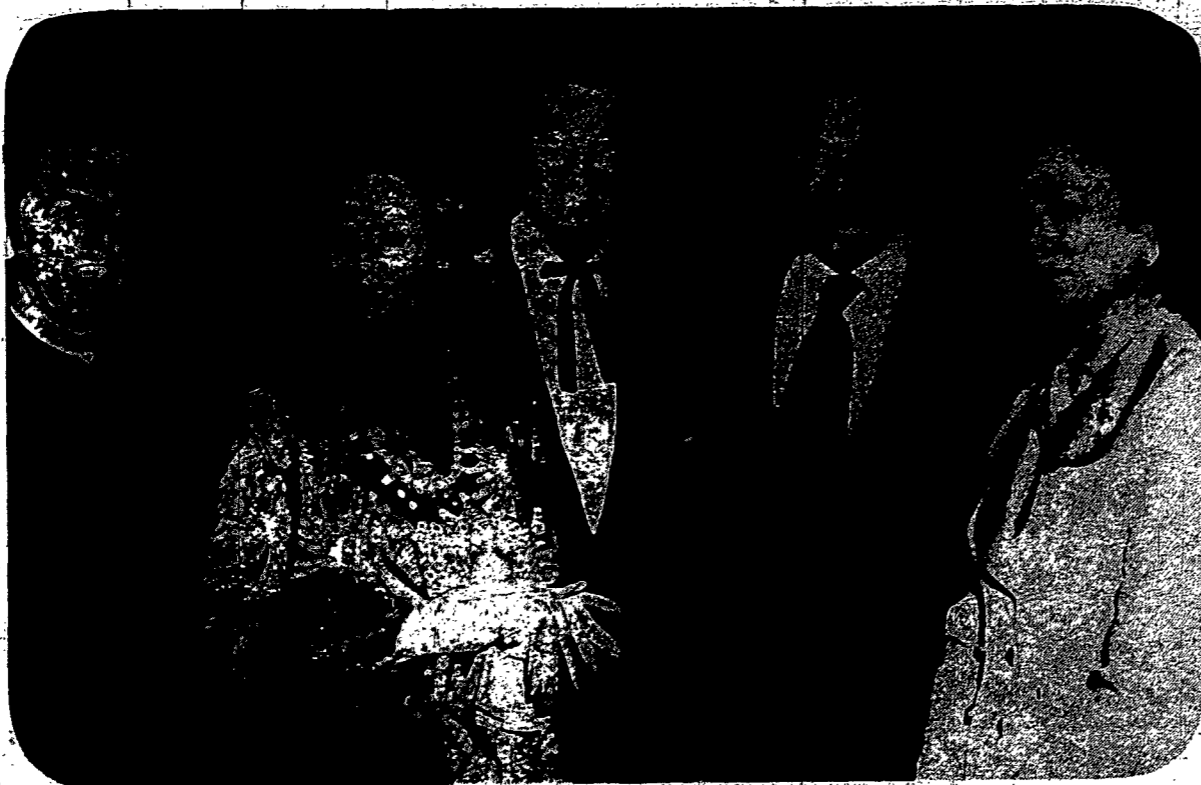
The possibility of Cardinal Josef Mindszenty visiting Rochester is still in doubt.

Mayor Stephen May invited the Hungarian prelate to Rochester as part of the cardinal's tour of the United States in September.

Last week, Father Basil Vegvari, OFM, of St. Ladislaus Church, in New Brunswick, N.J., who is in charge of Cardinal Mindszenty's tour answered May and said that his schedule is "very tight."

However, Father Vegvari said that "if at all possible (we will) try to arrange for a visit" to Rochester.

Cardinal Mindszenty's itinerary has visits to New York City, New Brunswick, where he will dedicate St. Ladislaus Church, Philadelphia, Doylestown, Pa., Washington, Cleveland and possibly Toronto — all within 13 days.



Celebrities Aid Drug Fight

A benefit "celebrity banquet" aimed at helping to expand anti-drug abuse programs of the Catholic Office of Drug Education [CODE] drew a galaxy of Hollywood stars, TV personalities, government and Congressional leaders to a dinner in Washington, D.C. Among those attending were, from left: Father Roland Melody, S.T., CODE's national coordinator; actress Arlene Dahl; former Olympic swimming champion and star of Tarzan movies Johnny Weismueller; Raymond P. Shafer, chairman of the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, and Princess Grace of Monaco. CODE is a part of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Division of Health Affairs. The drug program, launched in February, 1972, has published a national newsletter, set up a clearinghouse for drug education materials, implemented a national speakers bureau and is attempting to develop full-time diocesan directors on drug education and prevention. [RNS]