

CHILD ABUSE... EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

Text and Photos by Ben Susso



Above photo courtesy New York State Dept. of Social Services

The problems of child abuse and maltreatment have been with us for longer than we can remember. Yet, the situation today is much better than in past centuries. As an example, in the 13th century, children were treated as slaves, to be worked until they dropped from exhaustion. By the 16th century, they were seen as unique human beings, and treated far better.

Yet, the problem of parental abuse of offspring is never-ending. Human interaction being what it is, even under the best of circumstances, it would seem perfectly illogical to enclose two or more different individuals in a home, day after day, and not expect some problems. Hence, the Child Protective Services Act of 1973, and similar laws throughout the United States.

In 1966, only 416 cases of child abuse were reported in New York State. By 1974, 4,050 cases were reported—about a 1000% increase. In 1975, 72,000 children were reported as abused or neglected throughout the state. There were 122 deaths reported across New York State in 1975, and 2 of these were in Monroe County. However, there were 10 deaths in Monroe County in 1976. These figures point out most dramatically the increasingly significant problem we all face.

The maltreatment or abuse of children is a crime, but a most difficult one to discern. Since the majority of both abuse and maltreatment instances take place in the home, and without witnesses, only circumstantial evidence is available. This being the case, the courts find it exceedingly difficult to prove guilt on anyone's part. In any event, the solution lies not in a brief stay behind bars, but in effective services such as psychiatric care and social casework.

The abused child, in legal terms, is one less than 16 years old whose parent or guardian inflicts physical injuries, creates the risk of such injuries or commits an act of sexual abuse against the child.

A maltreated child is a person under 18 years of age who is the victim of physical injuries inflicted intentionally by parent or guardian, or who is impaired as a result of a parent's failure to supply food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care or proper supervision; to refrain from excessive corporal punishment, to restrict use of drugs or alcohol or to take precautions against damaging conditions. "Maltreatment" includes abandonment.

Suspected child abuse and maltreatment must be reported, whether one is sure or not. Anyone may make such a report, and certain people, such as physicians, school officials, day care center workers, and many others who deal with children on a professional basis, are required to report when there is reasonable cause for suspicion. Anyone who does report is completely immune from any liability, provided the report is made in good faith. In addition, children can be taken into protective custody under certain conditions, by certain people, such as a peace officer, a physician, or a child abuse caseworker. However, removing the child from the home is very rare, and is not considered unless the child is obviously in physical danger or the parent is in a physical or mental state which would preclude taking proper care of the child.

While New York State's laws protect the children, the parents have rights as well, and these rights must also be protected. Parents must be told exactly what is happening, and are guaranteed a prompt court hearing. Anyone accused of abusing or maltreating a child has the right to counsel, which is provided for them if necessary.

In sum, the states have provided laws, and people to deal with child abuse and maltreatment. It is up to individual members of our society to remain vigilant so that children can grow to be happy, healthy members of society.

MONROE COUNTY

CHILD PROTECTIVE INTAKE

Sept. 1, 1975 - Aug. 31, 1976

TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERRALS —

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Abuse | 11.4% |
| Maltreatment | 88.6% |

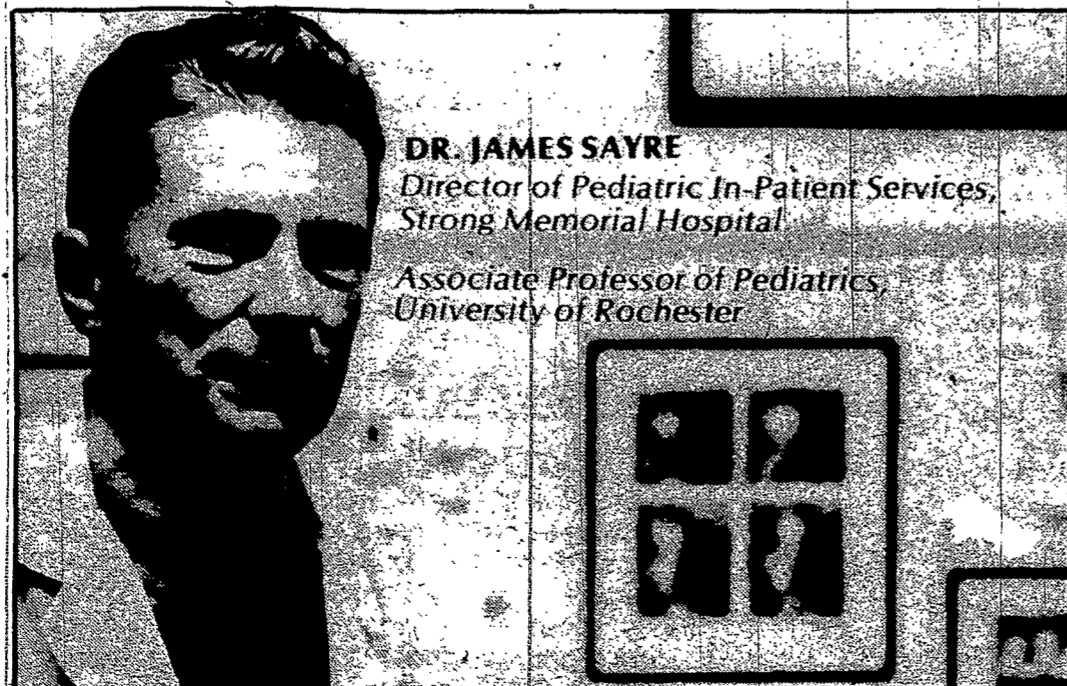
LATEST STATISTICS

Sept. 1 - Nov. 30, 1976

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Abuse | 52 |
| Maltreatment | 442 |
| TOTAL | 494 |

Source of Referrals

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Interested citizens | 20% |
| Police | 16.9% |
| Relatives | 15.5% |
| Anonymous | 11.9% |
| Medical | 10.3% |
| School | 9.9% |
| Social Services Staff | 6.5% |
| Other Agencies | 6.1% |
| Victims | 1.7% |
| Court | 1.2% |



DR. JAMES SAYRE
Director of Pediatric In-Patient Services,
Strong Memorial Hospital
Associate Professor of Pediatrics,
University of Rochester

We see most of our cases in the Emergency room, since this is where they are brought. The people there are trained to look for certain signs that would indicate possible abuse. Since we also see the family experiencing stress, we must determine their problems as best we can, and look to ways to solve these problems. We might admit the child to the hospital, either because the injury requires observation, or sometimes to protect the child from the possibility of further abuse.

We have about 30 in-patients and about the same number of out-patients here at Strong. Most of the injuries consist of welts or bruises,

and there are occasional fractures to deal with. Burns and hemorrhages are less common, but they do occur. We had a case of eye damage just recently, and organ lacerations, such as to the kidney or spleen, occur on rare occasions. There have been a couple of sexual assaults this year, where actual physical damage resulted.

The winter months, especially around the holidays, seem to be a particularly stressful time for parents. As a result, we see an increase in child abuse during this time of year. All of us who deal with children in a professional capacity must be constantly alert.