



APRIL IS NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH!

Help promote awareness by spreading the word!

It's called a hidden epidemic. Even with mandated reporting, and three million cases of child abuse reported nationally, experts estimate that the real rate is easily three times that number. Did you know that a report of child abuse is made every ten seconds? In Montgomery County, MD (outside of Washington, DC) in 2007 (the latest year for which statistics are available), officials documented 599 cases. And we know that when the economy gets worse, violence towards women and children goes up exponentially. All these dry statistics hide the real story of human pain suffered by the youngest members of society.

Tommy was one such child. His father left when Tommy was four. His mother has had a series of live in boyfriends. Most of them don't like Tommy too much and fight with his mother over the rules for Tommy. Sometimes she gets beaten and sometimes Tommy does too. He tries to stay out of their way. He doesn't bring friends home or go to anyone else's house either. Secretly, he thinks there is something wrong with him that his mother never told him, and he is getting punished for it. He feels angry and helpless at the same time. He doesn't tell anyone about what happens at home. His mother doesn't believe it's anyone else's business.

Ellen's father drinks and she dreads the weekends when he is home and drunk most of the day. That's when he comes after her, corners her in the bathroom or comes in her room at night. She wonders why her mother never says anything. She must know. No one says anything. Her brothers mess around with her too. She thinks the same thing happened to her older sister, but she left the house as soon as she could. Ellen is so ashamed she can't talk about it. She has no friends because she doesn't know what to say to them. She thinks maybe if she is good and does everything right, she can make it stop happening.

Children like Ellen and Tommy can escape the attention they need to get help. They "fly under the radar." The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (on the FAQ section of the website) states that "children are more vulnerable than adults because their brains are not mature enough to integrate what has happened: the younger

the age, the more likely trauma related disorders will develop.” National child abuse statistics document that children age 0-3 are the most likely to experience abuse.

Sometimes the full effects of what these children have experienced are delayed until much later, well into adulthood. For many children, it is not safe to feel the effects fully until they are out of the situation. Fully 80% of these children grow up to have at least one psychiatric diagnosis by the age of 21. Some of these children experience abuse that is so early and so sustained that they fragment the developing sense of self to blunt and deny the pain of what is happening. When that happens, the result is what is commonly known as Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Social disorders also follow a similar path of attempting to blunt or act out pain. Abused children are 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy, 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 30% more likely to commit a violent crime. Such children fill our prisons; they abuse alcohol at 2.5 times the rate of the general population, and drugs at 3.5 the rate. An overwhelming two thirds of those in drug rehabilitation report a history of child abuse.

By the time we document all this waste of human potential, it is too late for many. For others, there is the possibility of treatment. Trauma informed professionals, such as those in the International Society of Trauma and Dissociation, can help with the repair of the sense of self that has been so wounded in the experience of enduring abuse. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. It's a time we can all focus on preventing this tragic outcome. The first step is awareness. It is a step we can all take. Somewhere close to you, there may be a child who can't ask for help, and depends on you to break the silence about child abuse.

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On behalf of the ISSSTD Public Relations Committee