

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Special Collections

4-23-1974

Experts probe child abuse problems at conference

Lisa Halvorsen

University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice



Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Halvorsen, Lisa, "Experts probe child abuse problems at conference" (1974). *Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. 518.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice/518

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Experts probe child abuse problems at conference

by Lisa Halvorsen

Every day there are hundreds of recorded instances of children being abused or sexually molested, yet often times nothing is done about it. Part of the problem is that a lot of people don't know what to do.

To help teach the public about child abuse, a day-long conference was held on Saturday in Hauck Auditorium. It was one of the clock hour programs sponsored by the Maine Home Economics Association and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service.

A number of knowledgeable state residents were invited to give their feelings on child abuse in Maine. In the morning session Representative Ted Curtis (R-Orono) spoke on the various legislative measures which have been taken regarding parental beating of children. He spoke of one in particular, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, passed this year, which involves the compiling and publishing of information on the subject and provides grants for the training of medical personnel in this field.

Curtis also made the point that "we must get away from the idea of the child as being chattel. He is a person with the same rights as the parents." The representative said he favors raising the reporting age of child abuse from 16 to 18.

The medical point of view was given by Dr. Horatio Lichter, a native Argentinian who practices pediatrics in Lewiston. According to Dr. Lichter, "an act of injury which tends to cause harm to a child becomes a repetitive action." He went on to describe some of the "battered children" he has encountered since he began practicing medicine. Citing one instance when a child under three years old had been pounded on the head hard enough to cause internal bleeding and blindness. More common cases, say Lichter, involve ruptured stomachs, multiple bruises and bone fractures.

Julia Zorn, a mental health counselor at the Stephens Memorial Hospital in Norway, Maine, has also come in contact with a number of beaten and bruised youngsters. She holds a Masters in Social Work and has taken specialized training with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Her speech dealt with the child abuse syndrome and how it can be detected. "The child is usually under three years of age," said Zorn, "and the abuse quite often is a recurring act." She added that "many times the injury is not taken care of until the child is near dying or a criminal

suit is brought against the parents." Zorn said the parents involved usually offer poor excuses of why they beat the child or try to ignore the incident entirely.

The panel also included Stephen Prince, a member of the Maine Bureau of Social Welfare, who gave list of specific steps to follow if one suspects or has definite knowledge of child abuse.

"The best thing to do," said Prince, "is to call one of the six regional offices in the state." An institute protection worker will take down all the details and make proper referrals. The agency will then notify the parents that a complaint has been made regarding their treatment of their children. Prince agreed with Zorn that most parents will deny abusing their youngsters.

The agency may offer facilities or a counselor to help the family. Then there are court hearings and the judge decides whether the child will be placed in the custody of foster parents or be allowed to remain at home.

His speech was followed by some comments from clinical psychologist Martin Margulis, who discussed the concept of violence and the "battered child" from a sociological point of view. According to Margulis, "society is becoming more complex, and it is now becoming acceptable to use violence to control another person's behavior."

He said he would like to see an end to corporal punishment in the schools and a reduction in poverty situations. Dr. Margulis is especially concerned with the former. To explain his stand he remarked, "punishment only suppresses the behavior. We need to give the individual the means whereby he can socialize the child without punishing him."

The last speaker for the morning was Janice Lynch, a member of the Maine Bar Association. She listed the legal and moral rights of the parents and the children and what can be done if those rights are violated.

There are three ways of bringing a civil suit for child abuse against the parents says Zorn. A petition for protective custody may be brought by an agent of the Health and Welfare Department, a petition signed by three witnesses or through the sheriff's office, or, if the abuse is severe, the county attorney's office may prosecute criminally.

Abuse cases include those of a physical or emotional nature or instances of incest, abandonment, or lack of supervision.

After a break for lunch, the speakers entertained questions from the audience about child abuse, foster homes, legislative prevention and similar matters. A film, "Children in Peril" closed the session.

