

Worst after holidays, experts say

Child abuse at its peak

United Press International
TRENTON, N.J. — January and February are the cruelest months for children, child care experts say.

"It's the post-holiday syndrome," says Julia Douglass, assistant director of the Children and Youth Agency in Philadelphia. "We advise our per-

sonnel to expect an onslaught of (child abuse) cases — those they are handling are likely to erupt, and you always get a lot of new cases."

The syndrome has diverse roots. People suffer a mental let-down after the excitement of the holidays. Christmas bills pile in on top of winter fuel charges.

So parents vent their frustrations on their children. More are beaten and abandoned at this time of the year than any other, experts say.

For example, a parent may see the Christmas toys destroyed or no longer functioning, Douglass said.

"You juggled money to pay for those toys, not the monies you thought you had coming in, but from somewhere else, such as the rent," Douglass said. "It just builds up, and the parent feels he can no longer cope."

Norman Chickachop, super-

visor of the New Jersey state Office for Child Abuse and Neglect Control, said: "The last weekend in January was a record weekend for us. We had almost double the number of normal calls for a weekend."

The agency, a branch of the state Division of Youth and Family Services, fields weekend, night and holiday calls statewide. It does everything from giving advice to sending a worker to visit a family in crisis.

Experts say parents vent their anger on children just because the children are handy.

"Child abuse occurs anywhere a parent feels under stress," DYFS spokeswoman Sylvia Burd said. "A bill collector, or maybe a husband who's left the family."

The problem is more prevalent among the poor because their frustrations are greater and their options more limited, the experts said.

Susan Larson, spokeswoman for the Governor's Commission on Child Abuse and Neglect, said post-holiday child abuse can stem from a parent's feeling he has failed his child.

"From my experience, parents are often depressed because they can't provide their children with what they thought they should be giving them," Larson said.

"You have the parent who is struggling, and has maybe gone out and bought things and gone over his head. You (the parent) get through the holidays and then you have to face reality."

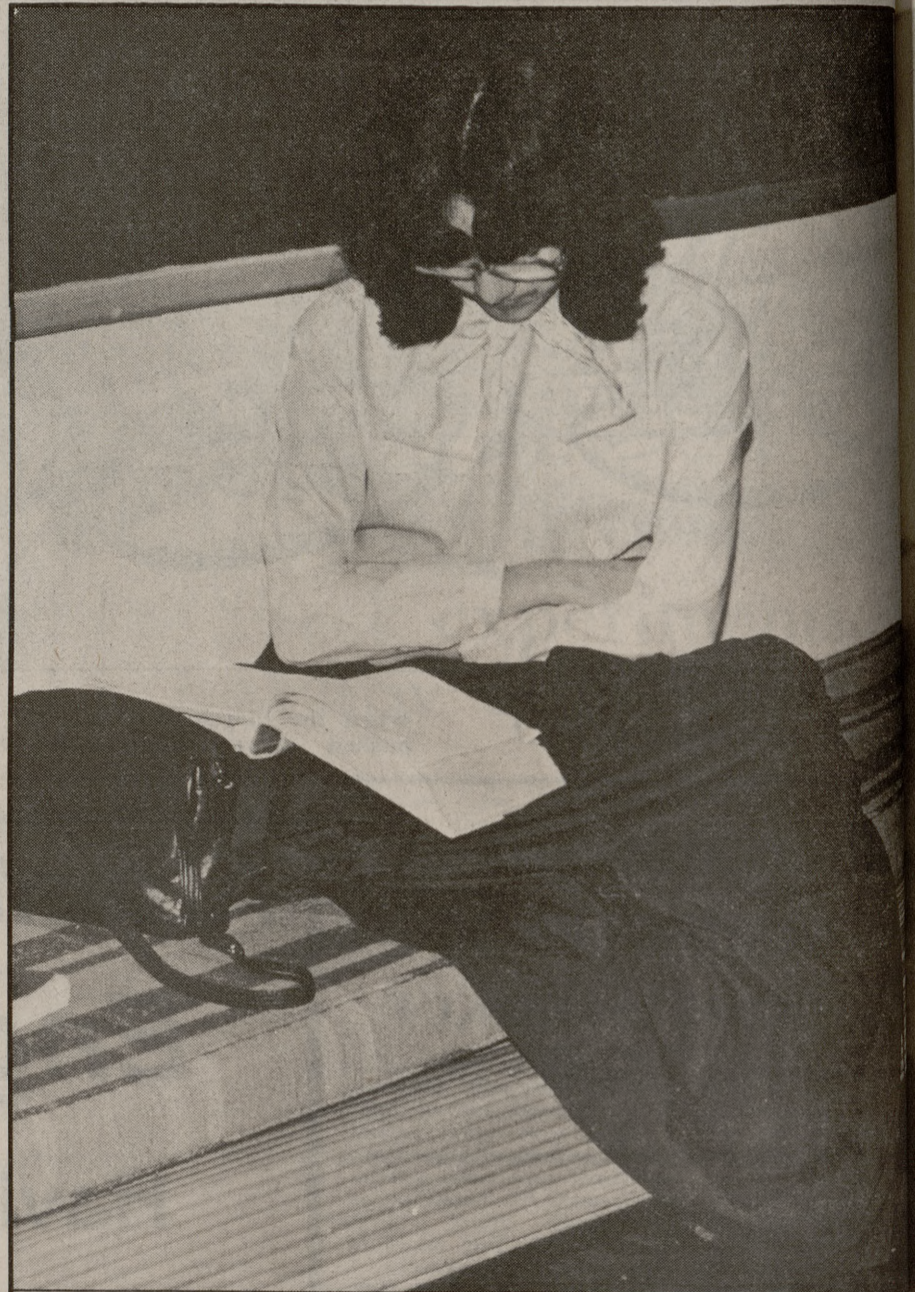
"Money makes a lot of things easier. When you don't have the resources, emotional or physical, to make a change in your life, what that means is the only thing you are going to recirculate are your frustrations."

Except in the most severe cases, agencies try to keep abused children with their families. They offer counseling, financial advice and family planning information. They will even hire a homemaker to help through a rough time.

Ron Gerring, head of Catholic Welfare Service's Family Growth Program in Trenton, said his private agency gets more crisis calls during the post-holiday season — "Parents calling up saying, 'I'm about to lose my cool with myself, I need to come in and talk to someone.'"

The agency receives referrals from DYFS. Gerring said caseworkers deal with one family for extended periods. They visit the abused child's school and the family's home at least once a week and bring the entire family in for therapy.

Often, a parent just needs to know that someone cares, Douglass said.



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Albuquerque woman takes some lip from her attacker

United Press International
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A woman saved herself from a rape attempt by biting off the lip of one of the attackers, police say.

The man was later arrested at a local hospital.

Capt. John Sands of the Bernalillo County sheriff's office

said three men were taken into custody and charged with attempted rape after the woman, 26, identified her alleged assailants' car at the hospital.

Sands said the attacker who sought medical attention was missing a portion of his lower lip

— about half the size of a quarter.

The men were arrested Friday after Lovelace Center authorities notified police.

The woman told police she was hitchhiking in Albuquerque last Friday when she offered her a ride. She took her east of the city near a cafe and forced her to begin disrobing at knifepoint.

"A scuffle started and I bit off the bottom lip of one of the men," Sands said. "She got part of her clothes, jewelry out of the car and hid in the bushes. The men panicked."

Martin Alderete, 23, with the injured lip, Jaramillo, 27, and Jaramillo, 26, all of Albuquerque, were charged with attempted

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