



Report Information from ProQuest

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Child abuse frequent in military: social worker

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Abstract (Abstract): Brenda Richard of Dalhousie University's Maritime School of Social Work believes child abuse is more common in the military than in civilian life. High levels of stress, long periods of absence and rigid attitudes take their toll on Forces families.

Statistics on child abuse in the military are not kept separately from civilian cases. However, in the last 22 years, five servicemen and one service wife have been convicted of manslaughter or murder in the death of a young child in Nova Scotia. The province averages one child-abuse death a year.

[Christopher Allen Mitchell]'s lawyer argued that the sailor had been under stress from his new job aboard the HMCS Assiniboine when he moved in with [Kyle James Sarty]'s mother.

Full text: HALIFAX (CP) - By the time Kyle James Sarty died, neighbors could barely recognize the bruised, battered face of the once-beautiful child.

The toddler had been beaten and sexually abused for months. Two weeks ago Christopher Allen Mitchell, 22, a former seaman, was convicted of a murder his lawyer described as a product of job stress.

Brenda Richard of Dalhousie University's Maritime School of Social Work believes child abuse is more common in the military than in civilian life. High levels of stress, long periods of absence and rigid attitudes take their toll on Forces families.

"It can be like a pressure-cooker," says Richard.

The social worker says she has dealt with military families in which men believe "this family is my ship and I'm the captain" - a domineering attitude developed in the workplace.

"This may have something to do with the way they are treated in the military - a lack of control in their own lives may mean they take it out at home."

Lt.-Cmdr. Bill MacDonald, head of the Family Support Centre at Canadian Forces Base Halifax, says stress-related problems can lead to psychological or physiological problems. Those problems can, in turn, lead to violence in any home.

"We're no different than civilian society in that respect," he says.

Statistics on child abuse in the military are not kept separately from civilian cases. However, in the last 22 years, five servicemen and one service wife have been convicted of manslaughter or murder in the death of a young child in Nova Scotia. The province averages one child-abuse death a year.

Mitchell's lawyer argued that the sailor had been under stress from his new job aboard the HMCS Assiniboine when he moved in with Kyle Sarty's mother.

He took out his frustrations, the Crown argued, by using Kyle Sarty as a "a punching-bag or whipping-boy."

Lynda Davies-MacDonald, a mental-health nurse in Windsor, N.S., fears that society may be only seeing the tip of the iceberg when it comes to violence in the military.

Davies-MacDonald says emotional abuse is common especially with boys who do not - or cannot - measure up to their father's high expectations. Fathers may develop a boot-camp mentality, she says, in raising their children.

In other cases, military fathers are away from home for extended periods of time, "leaving all the family's problems at home with the mother there to pick up the pieces." Wives may strike out due to stress and frustration, Davies-MacDonald says.

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