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Couple guilty in rapes, abuse of 3 daughters

October 30, 1990 | By M. Dion Thompson

A man who raped three of his daughters repeatedly over a nine-year period -- causing 10 pregnancies that ended in abortions -- pleaded guilty in Baltimore Circuit Court yesterday to rape and child abuse.

The man's wife, who had described the family as "a very close and a very religious family," also pleaded guilty to rape and sex-abuse charges for her complicity in bringing the daughters to her husband.

As the three daughters watched impassively from the front row of the courtroom, the parents, both 43, entered their guilty pleas before Judge Kenneth Lavon Johnson as part of a plea agreement to avoid trial on as many as 30 counts of various sex- and child-abuse offenses.

The father admitted to three counts of first-degree rape and three counts of sexual child abuse. He agreed to three consecutive life sentences and must serve 30 years. He will be formally sentenced Dec. 7.

The mother pleaded guilty to three counts of first-degree rape and three counts of sexual child abuse. A person who aids and abets the commission of a felony can be charged under the law as if he or she had actually committed the crime.

The mother agreed to a 25-year sentence and must serve 15 years. She will be formally sentenced Dec. 6.

The Sun is not identifying the parents by name to protect the identity of the daughters, who are now living with relatives. The two eldest of the three daughters -- who are now 17, 20 and 23 -- are daughters of the woman from a previous marriage. The youngest is the child of both defendants. One of the daughters is now a medical student in the Midwest, while the others still reside in Baltimore.

According to court documents, all the abortions were performed over a nine-year period at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center by the same doctor, Dr. Julio C. Novoa. He could not be reached for comment late yesterday.

The abuse remained undiscovered until late this past March, when one of the daughters wrote at the bottom of a history test: "I hate life. I hate school. I hate people. I hope to die. Soon. . . ! ! !"

A teacher talked with her and then called the Department of Social Services.

Two days later, on March 22, the father sat down with police and gave a confession.

According to court documents, he told the police that he had started fondling his stepdaughters when they were 5 or 6, and began having sexual intercourse with them and with his daughter as they reached the age of 10 or 12.

He also told police that he himself had been sexually abused as a teen-ager by an older man who plied him and other boys with alcohol and money.

Appearing in court yesterday, the man said little except to tell Judge Johnson that he didn't believe he had been responsible for all of the pregnancies.

He also said he had never beaten the three girls.

The three daughters, accompanied to court by counselors and friends, displayed no emotion as their parents entered their pleas. The father looked over his shoulder at the young women once, but they gave no apparent response.

"This is a sad day for all concerned," Judge Johnson said.

Assistant State's Attorney Wanda Robinson, who prosecuted the case, said the abuse to which the parents pleaded guilty began in January 1981, when the oldest daughter was 13, and continued until November 1989.

During that time, the mother would bring the children to their father. She was present when some of the rapes occurred, either pretending to be asleep or facing the wall while her daughters screamed and fought.

"She was hoping that . . . they would get through this," Ms. Robinson said.

The family, which Ms. Robinson said relied on public assistance, lived in several different houses during the period when the rapes occurred.

The daughters were not allowed to have friends or to participate in extracurricular activities at school, according to court documents. The mother had not wanted her husband's sickness to

become public, nor to to be left alone to raise her seven children -- five girls and two boys, Ms. Robinson said.

In a letter to the court, the mother wrote: "We were a very close family and a very religious family. . . . I tried to justify my being aware of what was happening by saying that the kids are in a family unit, with a mother and a father, they are progressing well in school and neighbors and school officials all lauded us as a perfect family. . . . I'm sorry for not being there when [my daughters] needed me."

Court records show that after his arrest, the father wrote letters to his three daughters in which he apologized and asked their forgiveness. He signed one: "thinking of you always, love Dad."

"I really feel that I love my family, even though I have this problem," he wrote, going on to tell one daughter: "I hope one day I will be able to be a part of your life in a decent and respectable way."

That may never happen. As part of the sentence, Judge Johnson said he will order the father to stay away from the children for the rest of his life.