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Mother gets 15 years for complicity in sex abuse of daughters

December 07, 1990 | By M. Dion Thompson

A 43-year-old woman who admitted helping her husband rape and sexually abuse three of her daughters was sentenced yesterday to 15 years in prison despite a plea by her daughters that she be spared imprisonment.

Baltimore Circuit Judge Kenneth Lavon Johnson, who said he "agonized, agonized, agonized" over the sentence, called it simply "the saddest rape and incest case" he had ever seen in his 28 years in the law.

"It is beyond the conduct of the normal course of human events," he said.

The crimes spanned a period of nine years and resulted in at least five abortions. According to prosecutors, the woman at times brought the daughters individually to her husband's bed and on one occasion stayed in the room while one of them was raped.

Through it all, none of the three daughters reported the attacks to the authorities until late this past March, when the youngest of the three abused daughters wrote at the bottom of a high school history test: "I hate life. I hate school. I hate people. I hope to die. Soon. . . ! ! !"

Before being sentenced yesterday, the mother apologized for the "shame and disgrace" her actions had brought upon her family.

She told a court-appointed doctor in a presentencing interview that she thought of the abuse of her daughters "as a punishment, a test for us."

The Sun is not publishing the names of the woman or her husband in order to protect the privacy of the victims.

Yesterday, the three daughters sat quietly in the courtroom, while the prosecuting attorney and the defense attorney argued over their mother's fate.

First Wanda Robinson, the prosecutor, noted that the mother had shown no remorse. She also said that the mother remained silent to keep her family together and that though she may have been a very religious woman, her actions in regard to her religion were misplaced. The family are Moslems.

"It is she who chose not to report it," said Ms. Robinson. "It is she who, in her own words, chose to turn her eyes. It is she who took them for the abortions."

Then Bridget Duffy Shepherd, the assistant public defender, asked Judge Johnson to temper his sentence with mercy and give the mother, who had no prior criminal record, a five-year prison sentence.

"Her guilt in this case is one of omission, not commission," she said. "Her religious beliefs did play a major role in how she acted in this situation. She was using her religion as a crutch to get through this. She believed that what was happening in their family was God's trial of them."

Finally, the mother, wearing a white sweater and purple skirt, her hair wrapped in a white turban, stood and spoke in a soft, shaky voice.

"I am extremely sorry and deeply regret my actions, or no action for my girls," she said. "I want to apologize to my girls and my younger children for letting them down."

She also said she hoped to one day atone for her acts.

As she stood awaiting her sentence, Judge Johnson, spoke of the daughters and the irreparable damage done to them by "a father so vile and depraved." In a sense, the daughters, who could not turn to their mother for help, were trapped during the period of the crimes, he said.

"Not only could they not run to [their mother], she was in joint concert and participation with the father," he said.

Then Judge Johnson spoke to the daughters.

"The court agonized, agonized, agonized over whether he should be persuaded by your pleas for your mother. You want your mother home despite of what she did. You want her. You need her. The court understands that," he said. "But the court cannot be persuaded, and I hope you understand that."

Afterward, the daughters met with their mother in a courthouse lockup. Judge Johnson also granted the daughters' wishes that they be allowed to visit their mother in prison and that, upon her release, she be allowed to visit them during the five years she will be on probation.

The crimes mean a second-generation of the family has experienced sexual abuse. The father was sodomized as a teen-ager. The mother was raped when she was 17 but never told anyone.

"That was my way of dealing with things," she told the court-appointed doctor. "If no one knew about them, then they never happened."