

My Father Raped Me, Just Like That, Nearly Every Day

Child abuse by family members is on the increase. In one small district, six such cases were heard in court just this year.

“When Dad was drunk he wanted to touch me, everywhere. He grabbed and pawed me. The worst of all was when he sucked my breasts. He bit me. He threw himself on top of me. It hurt.

It was repulsive. He did it to me everywhere. In the car, in the bed, the woods, sauna, in the potato pit. He told me that if I tell anybody about it he will go hang himself.”

The girl saying this is 12 years old. She is now confiding the things her stepfather did to her to the doctors, the police investigator and the judge. This appalling molestation went on for years but the child had no one to complain to.

The girl’s mother swears to the investigators that she is making it all up.

The girl tries to commit suicide by stabbing herself in the belly with a knife. All is revealed only after she becomes pregnant by her stepfather. After the abortion, she writes to him: “Please be honest and tell mother. It was your child, after all.”

This story shouldn’t exist. But it does, and there’s an unattractively large number of others like it. This year, in just one small district – with a population of less than 40 000 – six cases of pedophilic incest were heard in court. This is twice as much as in the capital Tallinn.

“There is a long way to go in uncovering domestic rape. The schools are not qualified enough to recognize mistreated children and some schools prefer to hush everything up to protect their reputation,” says one of the six prosecutors, specialized in dealing with such cases in Estonia.

“Child welfare officials are too busy with other duties to keep an eye on the families with a risk of abuse,” says another.

“The incidence of such cases may not have grown at all. The knowledge is growing. The barrier that has kept the children from talking about things like that is beginning to crumble,” says yet another.

“Various perversions will never be abolished until sleaze continues to be accessible on the internet,” claims the fourth.

All who talked to the Eesti Ekspress believe that only a fraction of pedophilic incests reach the courts – one tenth at best, and even those mostly by accident.

To protect the victims, everyone in this story will remain anonymous. Even the prosecutors.

Often Mother Rejects the Raped Child

A woman expecting a baby comes home and is flabbergasted to find her beloved husband having intercourse with her daughter. She’s 12.

The startled man runs away, and the woman... gets pissed, beats up her daughter and phones her own Mum – what to do? The women will then come to a “sensible” conclusion: the best thing for everyone is to pretend that nothing happened. By then, the raped child will have had medical care and the doctors have a sperm specimen.

The girl’s mother crosses her heart saying nothing happened, and *if* something did happen, it must have been provoked by the little girl.

The suspect also pleads innocent. He cannot explain the sperm specimen – how on earth could it have got there?

Another case. A child molester in custody is awaiting trial in court. One morning, the mother and the mistreated child enter the prosecutor’s office. The child has told the investigators and experts long ago what her father did to her. But now the teenage girl, eyes brimming, explains the prosecutor that she saw everything that supposedly happened to her in a porn movie and just fantasized – Dad has done nothing.

“Talking with the child alone I had no doubt that the crime was indeed committed and that the mother had forced the child to change her statement,” says the prosecutor.

Often, mothers are the worst enemies of their raped children. According to some prosecutors, in 80 per cent of the cases, mothers deny everything. They tell the investigators that the child is prone to making things up, has wild fantasies, is seeking revenge. Or that the daughter herself beguiled Daddy or stepfather into having sex with her.

Some of these mothers have been victims of abuse themselves. With the majority, financial calculation takes precedence. If the father of the family goes to jail, money may soon run short, very short. So the mothers will start working upon the daughters: it is your fault that Dad is in custody, now we will starve until you take your statement back.

“What most often amazes me is that mothers never go to the police and when the investigation is already under way, they’ll keep repeating that they knew nothing,” says one of the prosecutors. “On one hand, this is self-defence – you don’t want to say that you had your suspicions but failed to act. On the other hand, a lot of women genuinely can’t believe their husbands are capable of doing things like that and find it easier to put it down to an adolescent fantasy than to a predator husband.”

Predators don’t lack imagination

Only a small minority of pedophiles are prone to physical violence. They play with the victim’s feelings, coax and threaten. “If you tell anyone, Daddy will go to jail.” “Mommy will be very angry if she finds out.” “Maybe we’ll have a divorce and I’ll never see you again.”

These are the most common lines but they are usually said only after the intercourse.

“It all begins with the semi-innocent touch,” says the prosecutor. “After all, fathers do caress their children, don’t they? Then there are bathings, scrubbing. At one point the child is in a position where he or she cannot refuse the father.”

“The child thinks that everything father does is alright. They don’t know there is something criminal there. In my opinion children should be better informed, they should be explained in the playschool that certain ways of touching are improper and should be spoken about,” another recommends.

“Someone like that says to the child, “It is perfectly normal that Daddy teaches you those things, who else should do it?”” says a third prosecutor. “But if you have done it once, you won’t be able to say no. Then father will say, “I’ll tell your friends what kind of a person you are, I’ll tell mother that you asked for it.” Or he will threaten the child with a divorce, police, jail or suicide – manipulation stops at nothing.

A grandfather abused his grandchild for years. He took the girl out to the hay field, made oral contact with her genitals and demanded she urinate on him. It started when she was 4 years old. “It would never have been discovered if the girl hadn’t become worried about her little sister. The sister was reaching the age when her own sufferings had begun. She talked to her aunt and the woman reacted in the right way,” says the prosecutor. Another long term abuse case was discovered only when the daughter had had enough and attacked her father with a knife.

The cases where a child is driven to the brink of suicide after enduring years of unwanted sex are not rare either. One of the prosecutors told us of a 14 year old girl, repeatedly raped by her stepfather, who wrote an anonymous letter to the school psychologist. She said nothing about sex, just mentioned suicidal thoughts. With joint efforts of the psychologist and the crisis counselor the girl agreed to expose the rapist. “The child was terribly scared. She calculated what age she would be when stepfather got out of jail and if she’d be independent enough to deal with revenge,” says the prosecutor.

Unpredictable Consequences

The court is hearing a case where a father abused his daughters aged 9-12 for four years. “He did to them practically everything a man can imagine,” says the prosecutor. “But what worries me most amidst all this horror is what will become of these children afterwards...”

Immediate consequences are often among the least serious. Initially, the child is deprived of sleep – doesn’t dare sleep for the drunken stepfather may “accidentally” stumble into the child’s bedroom at night. Sitting becomes uncomfortable, he or she becomes tense and withdrawn, uncooperative at school. General apathy may cause hygiene problems. Other children perceive that and start ostracizing the victim, thus adding to domestic abuse. Signs of beating are much easier to notice – these are obvious to everyone. In most cases, sexual mistreatment leaves no visible marks. However, the trauma will be life-long.

English psychologists Carolyn Ainscough and Kay Toon have written a book “Breaking Free”, based on the recollections of people who have suffered sexual abuse. The gruesome study revealed that consequences of childhood abuse haunt us throughout our lives. They cause feelings of guilt and shame, depression and anxiety, eating disorders, fear of relationships and sexual problems.

“Who can tell how mistreated children will perceive sexual relations in adulthood? Will they see it as the foulest thing in the world or will they be able to enter normal relationships and put it all behind them?” asks one of the prosecutors. “As a rule, they will remain victims and

will continue living it for a long time. Nobody can tell how they will react to a tiniest trigger in the future,” says another.

Talk About It!

The prosecutors’ advice is to talk about abuse by all means. Even if it happened years ago. Cases of sexual crimes against children don’t expire that soon. A rape may be reported to the police 10 years after the victim has turned 18. “Report it, even if it happened 20 years ago,” urge the prosecutors. “We will react in any case and the perpetrator will not walk away with the sense of impunity. It is our task, together with the psychologists, to make the victims see that it was not their own fault.”

Just recently, in late November the Harju District Court sentenced a man who had abused and raped his stepdaughter in 1991-2000 to 10 years in prison. It had started when the child was only six years old. The raping continued till the girl was 16. The case was opened only in 2002 after the young woman filed a claim: she had been afraid to tell anyone before.

A 25 year old woman reported her stepfather having pawed and ogled her as a child. She did it because she was worried about her baby sister, living under the same roof with the man. He was cleared of any suspicion of sexual assault, however, his computer was found brimming with child pornography.

Yes or No to Public Exposure?

The Postimees daily has called for publicizing of names and photographs of all convicted pedophiles. None of the officials commenting to the Ekspress endorses the idea. Skywriting the name of the pedophile means skywriting the victim’s name, says one of the prosecutors.

“Even if the candyman picked an anonymous victim at random, the photo in the newspaper will make the assaulted person feel like – oh god, I’m in the news. They are writing about *my* case! The victim will take it personally and will not realize that his or her name was not mentioned. He or she may become detached for weeks and in the future, may have one inhibition less. And as for the perpetrators – if they fight it, take medication, go to a psychologist, why deprive them of hope and an incentive to reform by pillorizing them?”

“I don’t side with that – this would only mean stigmatizing, it doesn’t rid the pedophiles of their urges. Pedophiles must have access to treatment and their movements must be registered by the state so that they wouldn’t settle down near playschools, etc. For some reason we don’t see that in the United Kingdom a lot of progress has been made by doing just that, registering home addresses with the police and informing the neighbourhoods about the pedophiles,” says another prosecutor.

“I would expose the ones who deny their problem. For those who tackle the problem, stigmatizing would be cruel and could add to mental disorders, even to the point of suicide,” says another.

All the people commenting to the Ekspress agreed that registries meant for official use, like the ones existing in the UK, are indispensable. Every police officer should know about a convicted child molester settling in his or her area. Every school and kindergarten ought to have information about whom not to employ, even if it is a handyman. “In the UK, convicted

rapists are kept under surveillance for a lifetime. The local constable will know when such a person settles in his or her area. There are unannounced house visits. Here we just talk about the idea.”

To Punish or to Cure?

In Estonia, child molesters usually get long prison sentences. But this is not always viable. Sometimes, to spare the child from a court procedure, compromises have to be made. The prosecutors say that putting a child through adversary court proceedings is like setting a bunny against a boa constrictor.

Even though the Supreme Court has ruled that the defendant must be allowed to interview the child, the prosecutors feel that sparing children should be the first consideration here. “We use expert opinion, we videotape the interviews so as not to leave any doubt or ambiguities. If an expert says giving evidence in court is going to harm the child we won’t do it. That’s that. It’s not as if one of the defendant’s basic rights is to question the child at a random stage of the proceedings. The child’s mental health surely overrides those rights. The investigators have to be professional enough to clear off the ambiguities.”

One of the prosecutors explained why he sentenced a cunning and careful man, who had repeatedly molested his twelve year old daughter, only conditionally. The man always used a condom and never had actual intercourse with the girl but just mimicked it – so as not to leave any hard evidence. All was discovered by an accidental eyewitness who happened to walk by the car where the intercourse was being committed. The eyewitness called the police, the daughter told nothing.

“The man admitted that he was ill and needed treatment,” said the prosecutor. “Also, he is the sole bread earner of a large family. And yet another thing – sentencing him to prison would have meant that the whole local community, her schoolmates etc would become aware of what happened to the girl – raped by her own father... I decided that – all things considered – a long probation, compulsory visits to a psychologist and getting treatment will be best.”

Some prosecutors disagree: “I don’t believe in treatment,” says another. “Naturally, the “electronic bracelet“ and treatment are popular catch phrases among the pedophiles to get the parole. But treatment – I regard this as postponing the next assault for just a little while. It all really begins with the pedophile’s wish to check himself, to control his own urges, and that will never happen by pressure from the outside... At present, in Estonia, someone’s intake of pills is not something we are able to monitor.”

“It’s not the pedophiles’ fault they were born like that,” says another prosecutor. “Pedophilia is a diagnosed disorder and the state is obliged to deal with it. Persons who recognize their disorder must get access to treatment. Tougher sentences only work for those who deny their problem. But in that case the only effective punishment would be a life sentence.”

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In Estonia, 70 per cent of the victims are under 14 years old. Nearly 80 per cent are girls.

In more than a half cases the child victim was a relative or someone the molester knew.

The typical child molester in Estonia is male, 30 to 55 years old, nearly always of Estonian nationality, having no accomplices.

According to one of the prosecutors, most of the child abuse cases heard by the court come from underprivileged families. “However, you can’t go by that,” he adds. “The better off the family, the less chance of exposure. There are additional motives to cover up: social standing, etc. And the media won’t crack down on “unexceptional” pedophiles either.