

Child abuse in eye of beholder

BY JENNI BURROWS

It is 7:45 a.m. Mr. and Mrs. X leave for work, locking the door to the house behind them. They drive away, leaving their three children to wait for the bus that will take them to school. The children are clad in raincoats, carrying umbrellas. It is raining very hard.

At the same time, Mr. and Mrs. Y leave their house in another part of town. Before they go, they lock their 4-year-old daughter in her bedroom, telling her that if she's good and doesn't make any noise, they might let her out to watch television when they return that night. The room is cold and dirty.

Mr. Z is sleeping off a hangover. Mrs. Z, frustrated and angry at her husband, yells at her 8-year-old son when he asks for more orange juice. He persists, and she blows up, hitting him in the face, giving him a black eye, and cutting him with her wedding ring. When he cries in pain, she pushes him down the stairs, knocking him unconscious.

Which situation constitutes child abuse?

People must report abuse

The answer lies in the eyes of the person who reports the situation to the police.

In Lincoln, the answer is "all of the above." The X, Y and Z parents are all subject to being accused of child abuse or neglect.

"Child abuse can take many forms," and is often difficult to identify, said Judy Wong, unit manager of Lancaster County Child Protective Services. She said that because much abuse occurs in the privacy of the home and since neglect is not always visible to the outside observer, child abuse and neglect is often not reported.

A child is considered abused or neglected if he or she is placed in situations dangerous to physical or mental health; cruelly confined, punished, tormented or tortured; deprived of food, clothing, shelter or care; sexually abused; or left unattended in a car if 6 years old or younger.

Emotional scars the worst

Emotional abuse is very difficult to prove," said Ms. Wong. She said that the effects of emotional abuse are devastating, but that

often the observer cannot make accusations because of a lack of specific evidence.

Citizens tend not to report child abuse when they should, Ms. Wong said, because they are afraid of being sued by the vengeful parents.

"They don't know that their identity will be confidential," Ms. Wong said.

Although society places great value on children, the privacy of the family is also highly respected Ms. Wong said.

"Parents have the right to discipline their children," she said. When the discipline becomes abusive, people continue to look the other way because "they prefer to believe the opposite, or else they don't want to get involved."

In Nebraska citizens are required by law to report any suspected case of child abuse or neglect. All states have similar laws, Ms. Wong said.

Call hotline if in doubt

To report cases of abuse or neglect, people can call the police, the Child Protective Services or the Abuse-Neglect Hotline.

Sometimes an abuse report is received and it turns out that intervention by CPS is unnecessary. "Sometimes an ex-wife or ex-husband will report because he or she doesn't like the quality of care that the kids are getting under the former spouse," Ms. Wong said.

She said some people will report bruises or dirty clothes as evidence of abuse or neglect. In cases like this, she said, the situation is handled with sensitivity. Often the family is in need of support or counseling.

"There isn't a high percentage of unfounded reports," Ms. Wong said. "Generally, there are problems present when we get reports. We receive very few crank calls."

Police have hands tied

Abuse and neglect are often difficult to recognize, many cases are not brought to the attention of authorities. Lt. Lyle Roberts of the Lincoln Police Department said that although "rape is supposed to be the most unreported crime, I wonder about child abuse."

Roberts said that it is "very, very discouraging" for police to investigate a child abuse report and not be able to remove the child

against their better judgement because there is no imminent danger. According to Roberts police can only remove the child upon initial investigation if the child is in obvious danger due to abuse or neglect.

Although alerting the police is one of the first steps citizens can take to help an abused or neglected child, the police have limited power, Roberts said, and can't remove a child from a home on suspicion only.

After the initial investigation, the police inform the county welfare office of the case.

Leg of lamb in Lincoln costs lots

BY JIM ANDERSON

The value-conscious meat eater may want to cross lamb off his or her grocery list for awhile — that is, if it were on the list in the first place.

According to a number of Lincoln grocers and meat wholesalers, most Lincoln shoppers don't buy lamb anyway, and that's part of the problem: lamb is too expensive.

"It's higher than a cat's back," said Bob Voss, meat market manager for B & R IGA, 1709 Washington St. "We don't usually handle it at all because of the price." Voss said that a small amount is sold by his store — frozen legs of lamb from New Zealand — around Easter to a few buyers in the 40-and-over age bracket, who traditionally eat lamb for Easter dinner.

Voss said he buys New Zealand lamb because it is considered the best-tasting by consumers. The import duties on this meat add to the price, he said. On the average, Voss said, leg of lamb costs \$3.89 a pound in Lincoln. A comparable cut of beef, rump roast, costs \$2.49 a pound.

Less demand means higher prices

The big reason it's so expensive, Voss said, is the low demand. He calls this a vicious circle: there is less demand for the meat, so less is on the market. Lamb producers must then ask a higher price for the meat, compared to beef, in order to get a return on their investment. "The law of supply and demand works pretty well here," Voss said.

Aside from the market conditions, he said, lamb's meat yield is small; only 40 percent of the animal is edible. The remaining 60 percent must be thrown away.

"It just isn't good sense to pay so much for so little," Voss said. He said that if demand for lamb were to begin to reach that of beef

The office then makes an investigation and takes appropriate action. In some cases social services are required, but sometimes active measures must be taken to protect the child. Each case is reported to the State Central Registrar, a confidential file in which the names of both the victims and alleged perpetrators are kept.

Any person who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected can make a report, and no witnesses are necessary. The number for the Abuse-Neglect Hotline is 800-652-1999. It is a toll free call.

or pork it would take about two years for the price of lamb to approach that of beef or pork in the state.

Another reason for the relative unpopularity of the meat is the fact that Nebraska is beef and pork country. "People here just aren't accustomed to lamb," George Roseberry said. Roseberry is the market manager for the Belmont Jack and Jill store, 11th and Belmont Streets. Roseberry said Nebraskans are raised on beef and pork and don't know how to prepare lamb, so they don't bother with it. He said the demand for lamb throughout Nebraska, aside from Omaha and Lincoln, is virtually non-existent.

Roseberry estimates that fewer than one percent of Lincolnites eat lamb regularly. He said people who must eat it as part of a special diet and those who are fairly well-off financially are about the only customers for lamb at his store.

Most lamb is shipped east

About 100,000 sheep are slaughtered in Nebraska each year, Roseberry said, compared to more than 50,000 cattle a day. He says this too contributes to the increased cost. Because the demand here for lamb is so small, he said, most of the meat is shipped east, where the demand is greater, leaving what he called a lesser quality of meat for local consumers.

According to a spokesman for Cornhusker Wholesale Meats, Inc., 1443 Cornhusker Highway, no meat wholesalers in the city sell lamb except for special orders.


Jim Napier, market manager for the Hinky Dinky store at 2535 O St. said his store doesn't sell lamb unless it's on sale. He agreed that the demand estimate of less than one percent is a fair one. He said that veal sells about as well, citing its expense as the main reason for low demand.

The Hot Line

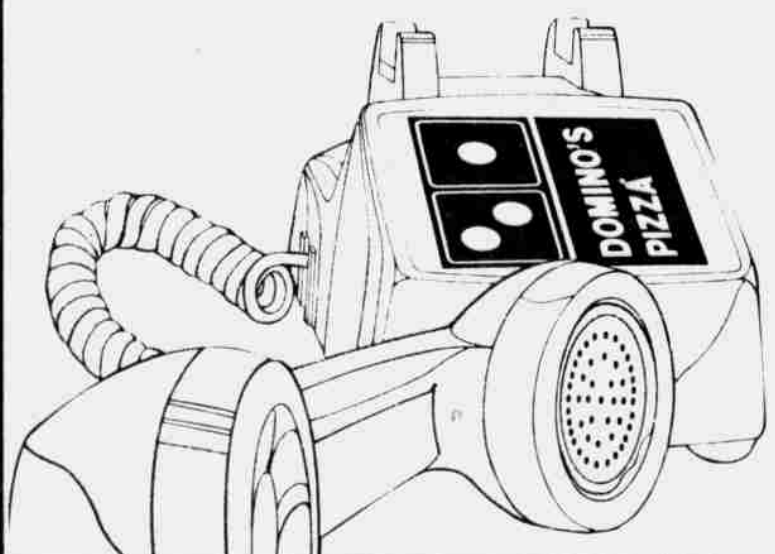
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