Violence against kids doesn’t spare Acadiana

By staff and wire reports

The U.S. Justice Department sounded the alarm Monday because a quarter of this country’s victims of violence are children. In Acadiana, when the crime is sexual abuse, the percentage of victims who are young may be even higher.

Kathy Bruno, director of University Medical Center’s Rape Crisis Center, says the center will have direct contact — not just phone counseling — with about 400 sexual abuse victims in the average year. At least three in every 10 will be younger than 18. Many will be younger than 14.

“We deal with a lot of kids here,” Bruno said.

Young victims of sexual abuse can be a challenge for counselors for the same reasons all kids are a challenge to parents, Bruno said. Young minds wander, and the youngest may lack the verbal ability to tell adults what they feel.

“You just make sure they don’t think it’s their fault,” Bruno said. “You tell them they didn’t cause what’s happening to them. ... With children, you have to use videos and puppets and play therapy.”

The videos help kids overcome guilt feelings. Kids use the puppets and dolls to help demonstrate what happened to them.

“When you get kids right after the incident, and it’s the first time... the parents will start reporting that the kids are better right away,” Bruno said. But some victims of violence are beyond help.

In 1991, the last year for which complete Office of Public Health statistics are available, 136 of Louisiana’s 824 young homicide victims died before they turned 19. Seventeen died before they turned 5.

More than half of all these victims — 75 — were African American boys ages 15 to 19.

Another 45 young people of school age committed suicide.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Violence: Against kids

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The statistics include all forms of violent death, including auto accidents. But the number of highway fatalities has fallen since 1985, so homicide and suicide deaths may be growing faster than the statistics indicate.

The Justice Department’s national statistics are from 1992. Those numbers say one juvenile in 13 was a victim of a violent crime. That was up 23 percent from 1987, when one juvenile in every 17 was a victim.

Disturbing figures about violence in America are released so often we treat them as if they were a box score from yesterday’s baseball game,” said Rep. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on crime.

In 1992, there were about 6.6 million violent crimes in the United States and about 23 percent of the victims were juveniles. The rate was 74.2 cases per 1,000 juveniles, compared to 13.9 per 1,000 people age 35 and older.

 Assaults accounted for 83 percent of the violent crimes against juveniles, and about 56 percent did not involve weapons or serious injury. But there were about 420,000 aggravated assaults against those 12 to 17 years old.

“These statistics are disturbing, and they are compelling proof that we must get the crime bill to President Clinton’s desk,” said U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno. “The crime bill’s combination of policing, punishment and prevention will give us the tools we need to help reduce this grim toll.”

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