

A CHILD OF RAPE

'A NIGHTMARE THAT'S NEVER ENDING'

A mother whose daughter was raped in an Illinois nursing home faces a grim reality about the grandchild she is now left to raise.

STORY BY LORI RACKL, PAGES 12-13A



Nursing home rape extends

Premature baby shows troubling signs of mother's disability

BY LORI RACKL
Health Reporter

Cheryl Hale-Crom watched helplessly as her tiny granddaughter's muscles stiffened and spasmed. The baby's big, brown eyes locked onto something far away, and she let out a blood-curdling scream.

Hale-Crom knew all too well what was happening. The baby was in the throes of a seizure. Hale-Crom had seen it before, shortly after the birth of her own twin daughters, Amy Jo and Amanda.

"It's like you're living it all over again. 24 years later," said Hale-Crom, bending down to reposition her granddaughter's head as the baby sat quietly in her Kick & Play.

"Everything I went through with Amy and Amanda, I'm going through with her."

"I shouldn't have to," added Hale-Crom, 49, in a voice laced with equal parts sadness and anger. "I didn't ask for this."

Becoming a grandmother is a milestone many women relish. But most women don't become grandmothers the way Hale-Crom did.

Her profoundly mentally and physically disabled daughter Amy Jo, 24, was raped in her Bloomington nursing home, where she shared a room with her twin. That rape resulted in the premature birth last July of the baby now living with Hale-Crom and her teenage daughter in their Rockford-area home.

Hopeful for a healthy child

The baby, whom Hale-Crom doesn't want named in the newspaper, recently turned 6 months old. Hale-Crom's biggest fear is that many of the same problems that plague her twin daughters — the seizure disorder, the severe mental retardation and inability to walk or care for themselves — also lurk in her grandchild.

It worries her that the baby isn't hitting certain developmental benchmarks, like being able to roll over or grip something in her small hands. She fears the seizures that

jolt the infant awake, sometimes two or three times a night. She wonders how this child will fare after her mother spent the majority of her pregnancy on anti-convulsants and without any prenatal care.

"I just want her to grow up healthy, but we're so uncertain about her prognosis," Hale-Crom said. "I can deal with a little slow, a little behind. But if she's like her mom, she's going to have to go into a home. It's not fair to me. It's not fair to my 16-year-old. It's certainly not fair to this baby."

Home fined 'insulting' \$10,000

Hale-Crom says she tried her best to take care of her brain-damaged twins, who require constant care. Working full time as a clerk at a local hospital left her exhausted. It didn't help that she was in a bad marriage. After 3½ years, the challenges finally overwhelmed her. She put her daughters in a home for handicapped children. Shortly before their 14th

birthdays, she moved them to Alden Village Health Facility, a 109-bed nursing home in Bloomingtondale.

"I put my trust in that home to take care of my children because I couldn't do it," Hale-Crom said. "That was a mistake."

Authorities say Amy Jo was raped by a nurse's aide at the Alden facility in late 2004. Soon after, she began throwing up frequently and putting weight on her slender 5-foot-2-inch frame, according to state Health Department documents. The documents say support staff had voiced suspicions that she might be pregnant — one employee reported seeing the baby move in Amy Jo's abdomen in May — but health care

workers chalked up her condition to constipation and feeding-tube problems.

The pregnancy wasn't confirmed until Amy Jo was seven months along. That's when paramedics took her to the hospital on June 11, after the home reported complications with her feeding tube. Nearly five weeks later, Amy Jo delivered the baby by C-section.

A Health Department investigation last year resulted in Alden being fined \$10,000 for what happened to Amy Jo — an amount Hale-Crom's lawyer calls "insulting."

"This family is going through not just a single incident but a



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CHERYL HALE-CROM



Cheryl Hale-Crom provides care for her 6-month-old granddaughter. The baby's "father's a rapist, and her mother

Despite law, state never formed panels

BY LORI RACKL
Health Reporter

The rape of Amy Jo Hale should have been reviewed by a team of experts charged with studying sexual assaults and unexpected deaths in Illinois nursing homes and recommending ways to prevent similar tragedies.

But the team didn't do anything. The reason: The team doesn't exist.

Nearly three years after Illinois lawmakers passed the Abuse Prevention Review Team Act, none of the eight regional teams the law called for has been formed. The law is set to expire in July.

"I'm puzzled why the original bill was passed, signed into law and nothing has happened," said state Sen. Susan Garrett (D-Lake Forest), who sponsored the legislation in 2003. "I still don't understand what has prevented the [Illinois Public Health Department] from putting this into place."

nightmare that's never ending," Chicago attorney Ed Fox said. "A fine like that is nothing."

Officials with Alden Management Services of Chicago, which runs several nursing homes in Illi-

According to Health Department officials, the answer is largely money. Deputy Director Enrique Unanue put the price tag for carrying out the law at nearly \$500,000.

"We only have a budgeted number of resources that are given to us," Unanue said. "We've been working very hard to figure out a way in which we could support it."

Would review possible negligence

An advocate for nursing home residents accused the department of using money as an excuse to ignore the law.

"If you don't want it to happen, just make it sound expensive," said Wendy Meltzer of Illinois Citizens for Better Care. Meltzer said the review teams likely wouldn't cost more than \$120,000 a year for support staff, equipment and incidentals.

The law called for the creation of eight, 14-member teams made up of representatives from a wide

range of disciplines, including law enforcement, medicine, social services, the nursing home industry and resident advocates. Members are appointed to unpaid, two-year terms.

The teams, each assigned to different areas of the state, are supposed to review a variety of records related to confirmed cases of sexual assaults in nursing homes as well as deaths that might have stemmed from poor care. The idea is to figure out why something bad happened and to suggest ways the state might prevent similar incidents in the future.

Advocate sees same problems

Public health officials say each year, on average, there are 18 valid complaints of sexual abuse or assault in Illinois nursing homes. They can't say how many deaths would be reviewed by the teams because no one tracks those numbers.

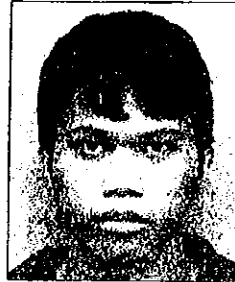
The teams aren't meant to du-

nois, are appealing the state's decision. An Alden spokeswoman declined to comment, citing pending litigation. Hale-Crom is suing the facility, as well as Amy Jo's nursing-home physician and Reynaldo

Bruce Jr., the 18-year-old accused of raping her.

Bruce, who had no prior criminal record and had worked at Alden since September 2004, was charged with aggravated criminal

family's agony



Reynaldo Bruca Jr.
18-year-old's DNA matched to baby

"shocked" when her son was arrested.

"My son is not bad," she said softly. "I don't have any problems with my children. I cannot believe this."

Disbelief is what Hale-Crom felt when Alden Village's administrator called with the news that her wheelchair-bound daughter, who has the mental functioning of a 7-month-old, was pregnant.

"I started screaming," Hale-Crom recalled.

She now wishes she had visited her twins at the home more often, wishes she would have known about the pregnancy sooner — when there was still time to end it.

As time goes on, her wishes take a back seat to worries. Day care for the baby costs money, something that's in short supply when rent eats up nearly half of Hale-Crom's \$1,154 monthly take-home pay. Debt drove the single mom to file for bankruptcy last year. She sleeps in an overstuffed armchair in her small living room. Her old bedroom became the nursery.

One of Hale-Crom's biggest worries isn't financial at all. It's emotional. She wonders how she'll be able to explain this to her granddaughter one day.

"Her father's a rapist, and her mother doesn't even know who she is," Hale-Crom said. "I look at her and I think, 'How will I be able to tell her that?'"

'She has no idea that's her child'

Hale-Crom has taken the baby to visit Amy Jo in her new nursing home, where she lives with her sister Amanda. She says both twins are doing well in their new surroundings. They're off their feeding tubes. While neither can communicate, they're alert. Amy Jo likes to bounce to the beat of the country-western CDs Hale-Crom brings her.

On a recent visit, Hale-Crom placed the baby on Amy Jo's lap and put her daughter's arm around the infant.

"She took her arm down," Hale-Crom said. "She has no idea that's her child."

Hale-Crom snapped a photograph of the two anyway. "I want to have pictures to show her someday," Hale-Crom said, brushing the baby's black hair with her fingers. "I want her to see who her mother was."

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doesn't even know who she is," Hale-Crom said. —RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

to study abuse records

uplicate investigations that already take place by police and public health workers.

"You keep seeing the same stuff over and over again and nobody addresses it systematically," Meltzer said. "We need to prevent these really terrible things from happening instead of just fining people after the fact."

New bill limits access

Frustrated the law hasn't been carried out, Garrett last month proposed new legislation that says nursing home fines could be used to pay for the review teams. Her bill, like several others recently introduced, also does away with the "sunset clause" that wipes the original law from the books in a few months.

"I'm sure there are some special interests who would love to see this go away, but it's not going to," Garrett said.

Terry Sullivan, director of the nursing home trade group Illinois

Council on Long Term Care, said the industry doesn't oppose the concept of teams reviewing sex crimes and suspicious deaths.

"We see it as quality assurance, on how we can do a better job," he said. "In that sense, we're all for it."

But Sullivan said it makes more sense to have one statewide team instead of multiple groups — a proposal being put forth in another recently introduced bill by state Sen. Christine Radogno (R-La Grange).

That bill, which has the backing of public health officials but not Meltzer's group, limits the types of documents the department would have to provide to the teams.

It also sets narrower parameters for which incidents could be reviewed, basically restricting the teams to cases that resulted in a state Health Department violation.

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sexual assault after tests matched his DNA to the baby. The Schaumburg teen has pleaded not guilty and is being held in the DuPage County Jail.

His mother, Evelyn Bruca, commented briefly when reached by phone at her Schaumburg home. Bruca confirmed that she used to work at the Alden facility and that her husband still does part time. She said she was

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Armed drivers more prone to road rage: study

Higher percentage of those with guns admit aggressive driving

BY FRANK MAIN
Crime Reporter

Americans with guns in their cars are more likely to engage in "road rage" than unarmed drivers, according to a new study funded by the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation.

The Harvard School of Public Health surveyed more than 2,400 people who were asked if they carried a gun in their vehicle at least once in the last year.

About 23 percent of those who said "yes" admitted to making obscene gestures while driving — compared with about 16 percent of those who claimed they never pack a weapon, the study said.

The survey also found 14 percent of those with firearms said they "aggressively followed" other motorists, vs. 8 percent of those without guns.

Tighter restrictions favored

The authors, David Hemenway, Mary Vrinotis and Matthew Miller, acknowledged their survey did not ask whether a gun was in the car at the time the road rage incident happened.

"Despite these limitations, our findings indicate that the same type of individuals who cause most of the road deaths in the United States — young males, particularly those who smoke, binge drink and have been ar-

rested for non-traffic violations — are most likely to engage in rude and hostile behaviors on the nation's roads," the authors said. "Road rage may be most dangerous when an enraged motorist has immediate access to a lethal weapon, such as a gun."

Vrinotis told the Journal News Scientist that "in the interests of injury and violence prevention, it probably makes more sense to tighten rather than relax restrictions on gun carrying in motor vehicles."

2 women among accused

John Lott, a controversial former University of Chicago economist and author of *More Guns, Less Crime*, scoffed at the study on his Web site. Lott criticized the survey for not asking if the guns were in the cars legally or illegally.

"Permit holders tend to be extremely law-abiding," he said.

Lott also gleefully noted that liberals are apparently much more likely to engage in road rage than conservatives, according to the study.

A review of 10 Chicago Sun-Times stories about road-rage incidents over the last five years showed two men were fatally shot, two men were wounded in shootings, one man was stabbed to death, one man was wounded in a stabbing, two men were beaten and one woman was splashed with coffee.

Two alleged offenders were women, including Kendra Davis, wife of a New York Knicks player. She was arrested Thursday in the Oct. 27 coffee incident in Naperville.

