

ANNE L. HORTON, B. KENT HARRISON, and BARRY L. JOHNSON, eds. *Confronting Abuse*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993. xv; 389 pp. References for each chapter, resource guide, index. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Janet Hooper, a psychotherapist in private practice in Salt Lake City.

Abuse—it's the psychological buzzword of the 1990s. We encounter an avalanche of information about abuse on television talk shows and sitcoms, in movies, magazines, children's books, and at the office (sexual harassment). So many celebrities, neighbors, and family members are "coming out" about their abuse, that a national organization has been formed to fight this trend—the False Memory Syndrome Association, dedicated to disproving accusations of abuse. Thus the 1993 release of a book on abuse just for LDS audiences is no surprise. What may be a surprise, however, is that the book is very *good*. Typically, difficult or sensitive material in books for LDS readers is watered down or even misleading. While religious topics are thoroughly addressed, psychological topics (other than those in a few good marriage enrichment books) are generally done very poorly. Thus, finding a book that addresses both scholarly and sensitive material *and* that is written specifically for the LDS population is a rare treat.

As we proceed through the book, we may well find ourselves asking with Susan Paxman in chapter 1, "Why do God's children treat each other so cruelly?" (4) and "Why does violence occur in a Latter-day Saint home?" (6). Some members of the Church may find their thoughts echoed by a passage from her chapter:

Some people in the Church will accept a story of abuse from a woman if the abuse has ended or if the woman's husband is inactive or a nonmember; however, if her husband is an active priesthood-holder, many Mormons simply cannot hear her when she tells them that he abuses her or their children. I have even heard that there are people in the Church who think that the issue of the abuse of women is a "fad," that a lot of women think they are abused because it's the "in" thing to be, and that the fad will soon pass. (5)

Regardless of our denial and disbelief, abuse does happen, and it happens in all varieties of Latter-day Saint homes: active and inactive, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, convert and born-in-the-covenant, professional and blue-collar. This book helps to

cut through the denial, dispel the myths, and put the occurrence of abuse in perspective. The chapters, written by a variety of professionals, lay clergy, and Church leaders, as well as two anonymous survivors, are presented in four main sections. At the end of the book is a short list of resource materials and organizations readers can access.

Section one, “Understanding Family Violence,” aptly introduces the issues of abuse and explains how to recognize abuse, how to safeguard one’s home from it, and how to deal with abuse if it is discovered in one’s own family. A definition of abuse is not offered here; that is left to section two.

A highlight of the first section is Ann Horton’s inclusion of “Guidelines for Preventing and Ending Abuse in Our Own Families” in her chapter, “Safeguarding Our Homes: What Every LDS Family Ought to Know about Abuse” (13). She admonishes readers to start the process of prevention by examining their family and selves (13). Our families would indeed be strengthened if each of us eliminated the verbal and psychological abuse that occasionally creeps into nearly all families, regardless of religious persuasion. Horton lists twenty-six common abusive behaviors of which to be aware.

Another highlight in section one is Alvin Price’s discussion on “Abuse or Discipline? The Threshold of Violence.” His presentation sensitively calls attention to when the line between discipline and abuse is crossed. For example, he defines *discipline* as “training that develops self-control or efficiency. In this context, discipline is a positive factor in raising independent and productive children” (27). *Punishment* is “an imposed penalty or harsh treatment . . . if . . . administered in anger or when a parent is out of control, it moves into abuse” (27). And *abuse* is “to use wrongly. [It] may involve physical force and causes injury (psychological, emotional, and physical)” (27). Violence, he affirms, “is to be avoided at all costs. It creates no positive result. . . . Punishment . . . is not the most effective means of changing undesirable behavior” (27–28). Price also discusses the circumstances that often lead to family violence and offers possible correction techniques to be employed when violence does occur.

Patricia Esplin also offers a timely chapter, “What to Do If Your Child Has Been Abused.” Both society and the therapeutic

community have come a long way in properly addressing the needs of abused children. Esplin's ideas are simple, clear, and appropriate and may keep frantic parents grounded while they face this ordeal.

No book on abuse would be complete without a discussion on dissociation and memory retrieval in adults who were molested as children. Elouise Bell and Noemi Mattis present a skimpy, but clear, overview of these issues in "When the Mind Hides the Truth: Why Some Abuse Victims Don't Remember." Mattis has impeccable credentials to write on this subject. Her coauthor is known to most of us only in her role as BYU English professor. The complexity and increasing controversy of this subject certainly warrants a more thorough discussion than is offered. In the interest of fairness, some time may well have been offered to those espousing the false memory syndrome. Such balance would allow readers to judge for themselves the realities involved. Unfortunately, this omission may serve as a reason for the False Memory Syndrome Association to discount the entire work. Yet, in keeping with the spirit of this volume being an overview, the chapter presents just enough information to make the audience aware of the issue.

Section one ends with an anonymous account of "What Survivors of Abuse Want Others to Know—A Guide to Their Pain." This is a tasteful collection of victims' stories, sufficient to emotionally engage the reader without offending the sensitive with the explicit details often portrayed in similar narratives.

Section two, "Types of Abuse and Guidelines for Change," presents the entire gamut of abuse. One chapter each is written on child abuse and neglect; incest; adolescent sexual offenders; sibling abuse; spouse abuse; marital rape; elder abuse; verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse; spiritual abuse; ritual abuse; and males as victims of abuse. Some readers may be put off initially by the comprehensive listing of types of abuse, again thinking this is a fad which has gone too far. But each chapter is concise, not heavy on statistics and research, and full of ideas, concepts, and examples—enough material to convince even the most skeptical reader. The information appears sound and concurs with the professional literature on each of these subjects.

The chapters in this section are written in a way that the reader cannot feel that these are situations that happen only to

other people. Indeed, many cautions and guidelines are offered to help “average” people improve the quality of their family lives and become aware of potentially problematic situations. Chapters that are particularly compelling are those on marital rape, elder abuse, and the more subtle verbal, psychological, and emotional abuses—opening the readers’ eyes perhaps for the first time to very real, and escalating, problems.

These chapters generally include information about the incidence of abuse, symptoms and dysfunctions typical of victims, and issues and steps involved in treatment. Some chapters add anecdotal stories to illustrate the problem. Two unexpected, yet valuable, chapters are Rex Kocherhans’s “Males Are Victims Too” and C. Y. Roby’s “Adolescent Sexual Offenders: Victims, Perpetrators, or Both?” These are two areas frequently underaddressed in both literature and popular works alike.

Lynn Roundy’s “Incest: Sexual Abuse in the Family” is an especially good portrayal of this difficult subject. She pulls together the necessary research information, adds a list of the typical defense mechanisms perpetrators frequently use to rationalize their actions, covers lightly the effects of incest upon the victim, and intersperses all with appropriate quotes from General Authorities. The best part of her discussion is a section on *prevention* of family sexual abuse. Roundy does not mince words about our responsibilities as parents. For example, she advocates that we “take our heads out of the sand” and “stop avoiding the subject of incest,” that we “become ‘experts’ on child sexual abuse” (suggesting that education is both empowering and preventative), and that we extend warnings to our children about saying no to strangers or to *anyone* “who acts in an inappropriate manner—including ourselves” (105). Her list of prevention principles sends strong messages to combat a serious problem, messages which LDS audiences need to hear.

An excellent, but perhaps controversial, chapter is Reed Finlayson’s “Sibling Abuse: Am I My Brother’s Keeper?” In it he writes, “Sibling conflict is accepted by many as a normal part of family life; however, abuse resulting from this conflict is the most prevalent form of family violence.”¹ Finlayson raises awareness of sibling abuse and identifies when and how that conflict becomes

destructive. As does Price's chapter on drawing the line between parental discipline and abuse, this chapter will undoubtedly stir up controversy. Effective in soothing that divisiveness, however, is Finlayson's style of not blaming while clearly emphasizing options for change. Especially useful and easy for all to accept are his eleven "additional considerations on sibling abuse," which highlight issues of power and coercion, age difference, secretiveness, frequency of abuse, and response to sexual activities (121). Finlayson warns that "parents must be *observant* of all children's activities and provide supervision that will minimize the opportunities for [abusive behaviors]" (124; italics added)—instead of assuming that children are too young or innocent to do harm.

Section three, "Some Specific Considerations for Ending Abuse," contains the typical how-to's expected in any publication on abuse: changing from the victim role, grieving appropriately, managing emotions, resolving and integrating the experiences, and ultimately, forgiving those involved in the abuse. The real strength of this section, however, is the added applications particular to the LDS audience. "How Can I Help? Concepts and Cautions for Ecclesiastical Leaders and Others" by B. Kent Harrison is good enough to be copied and circulated to all bishops and stake presidents. Judith Rasmussen Dushku's "Responding to Abused LDS Women: Roadblocks to Recovery" similarly offers specific responses, reactions, and comments victims commonly encounter that at best hinder healing and at worst do further harm. Through the years, my colleagues and I have seen many victims who have been further injured (mostly through ignorance) by ecclesiastical leaders, friends, and family members. Harrison's suggested guidelines about listening and sensitivity and about the roles of forgiveness, prayer, worthiness, guilt, and sin are important and helpful for those who work with LDS victims and perpetrators.

The final section, "Spiritual Recovery," covers material supportive of the previous chapters. It adds a further dimension by briefly incorporating LDS values and doctrines of spiritual maturity, change, progression, choice and agency, testimony, confession, forgiveness, and the Atonement. It also attempts to explain the role of adversity in the abuse and healing process. Unfortunately, Elaine Cannon's discussion on adversity, "Why Did Abuse Happen to Me? What Does

the Lord Want Me to Learn?" is weak and somewhat trite. Even the title—suggestive that the Lord *gives* people abuse in their lives to teach them something—is offensive to those who suffer from it (and, I may add, those who work with it!). It is true that those who survive extreme trauma can and often do use it as a positive learning experience. But victims need more than simple explanations to make any kind of sense of their suffering. In fact, when offered such explanations prematurely, survivors feel cut off and invalidated in their feelings and experiences. Cannon redeems her chapter somewhat, however, by offering "What Principles Can Be Learned?" which addresses the issues more directly and assigns responsibilities more clearly.

Placing "Spiritual Resources" at the end of the book may open the editors to criticism of being overly optimistic, since some victims and perpetrators of abuse will never become whole or functional in this life. Some lives are so deeply damaged that normal functioning is not possible until the healing power of the resurrection is obtained. On the other hand, leaving us with *hope* after experiencing anger, frustration, sadness, discouragement, and depression throughout the book does contribute to a sense of resolution, understanding, and a willingness to keep on fighting our personal and public battles with abuse, to keep helping ourselves, our families, and our society.

Finally, the book offers a varied menu of topics. There is something for every reader: information on a timely topic for those who want it; validation and comfort for the abused and their families; directives for those who work with victims and abusers, including ecclesiastical leaders; and guidelines for non-LDS therapists who wish to include Mormon theological concepts in their treatment of LDS clients. In short, I recommend the book to all.

NOTE

¹ Reed L. Finlayson, "Sibling Abuse: Am I My Brother's Keeper?" in *Confronting Abuse*, 118, citing Megan P. Goodwin and Bruce Roscoe, "Sibling Violence and Agonistic Interactions among Middle Adolescents," *Adolescence* 25 (Summer 1990): 451-52.