

MOTHER, DAUGHTER TALK ABOUT PAIN



Jazmin DeLeon, 15, spent most of her time in her bedroom until she finally told her mother, Doris Vasquez, that she had been sexually abused. Lisa Poole/Eagle-Tribune

Mom wishes she had known

Lawrence teen-ager reveals she was sexually abused and has begun healing

By Cathleen F. Crowley
Eagle-Tribune Writer

Jazmin DeLeon earned straight A's, she never missed school, and she always smiled. No one, not even her mother, suspected anything was wrong.

They didn't know that when she locked herself in her room, she thought about suicide and often cried herself to sleep.

"I was painting a whole different person for people to see," said Jazmin, a 15-year-old freshman at Lawrence High. "I didn't want anyone to see what was going on behind that picture, that perfect picture."

But Jazmin finally broke down last year and told her mother: Her own father had molested her for years. It started when she was 3 and didn't end until her parents divorced when she was

7 $\frac{1}{2}$. Last month, a Lawrence District Court jury found Jazmin's father, Luis DeLeon, 36, guilty of two counts of indecent assault and one count of sexual exploitation.

Mr. DeLeon, a machine operator from Lawrence, was sentenced to six months in jail, and he must register as a sex offender for the rest of his life.

"There is justice," said Doris Vasquez, Jazmin's mother.

Jazmin and Mrs. Vasquez are speaking openly because Mrs. Vasquez believes she could have stopped the molestation if she had known the signs. They hope their story will help other families recognize and stop abuse.

Jazmin used to walk in her sleep, wet her bed, and she would avoid her father.

"She was always saying, 'I don't want

SIGNS OF ABUSE

The following are general behavior changes that may occur in children who have been sexually abused:

- Physical complaints
- Fear or dislike of certain people or places
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- School problems
- Withdrawal from family, friends or usual activities
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene
- Return to younger, more babyish behavior
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discipline problems

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Please see **SIGNS**, Page 2

Use: Mother, daughter deal with teen-agers molestation

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ne alone with Daddy' and
/ daddy,'" Mrs. Vasquez
ver put the pieces together

abuse experts say every
ts differently to abuse, but
some common signs like
es, despondent behavior,
withdrawal, crying spells
retting.

we have to do is listen,"
en E. Lopez, director of
services at the Women's
Center, which offers coun-
d education to sexually
ildren and their families.
en usually will confide in
they can trust. In most
y won't say it straight out.
too much for them," Ms.
d. "They will say, 'I don't
person,' or they don't want
ie with someone. We may
as them being defiant, but
ir way of saying, 'I'm not

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Running away
Eating disorders
Passive or overly pleasing behav-
ior
Delinquent acts
Low self-esteem
Self-destructive behavior
Hostility or aggression
Drug or alcohol problems
Sexual activity or pregnancy at an
early age
Suicide attempts

comfortable in that situation."
Mr. DeLeon fondled Jazmin every
chance he could, though he did not

rape her, said Jazmin, as she sat on
her living room couch. Jazmin has
long, wavy black hair and wears
gold-rimmed glasses. When she's
not talking, she looks downward and
plays with the many rings on her fin-
gers. She is on the honor roll at
Lawrence High.

"He would do it when (my moth-
er) would go to the store, when she
was in another room; she would be
in the shower or she would be sleep-
ing and he would go into my room,"
Jazmin said.

There was no physical evidence of
the abuse, but Jazmin's court testi-
mony, which lasted nearly three
hours, convinced the jury she was
telling the truth.

"When she testified, you could see
the impact of the memories on her.
It was powerful," said prosecutor
Murat Erkan.

The trial lasted three days and the
jury deliberated for four hours.
Despite the short jail sentence Mr.

DeLeon received, Jazmin and Mrs.
Vasquez were pleased with the
guilty verdict.

Even when she was 3 years old,
Jazmin knew what her father was
doing was wrong.

"But not enough to go and say
something about it," she said. "I did-
n't think anyone would believe a 3-
year-old."

Her father had warned her he
would go to jail and her mother
would be mad if she told. He also
said he wouldn't buy her a doll.

Once her father moved out,
Jazmin tried to forget about the
abuse. She was shy and quiet. She
spent most of her time in her bed-
room. At her eighth-grade gradu-
ation, all her friends looked so happy.
She realized she wanted to be happy
too, but her secret wouldn't let her.

"It was bottled up inside of me
and I felt like I had to say some-
thing," Jazmin said.

Mrs. Vasquez said she "freaked"

when she found out. She wanted to
kill her ex-husband. The next day,
Mrs. Vasquez took Jazmin to a doc-
tor and within the week, they went to
police. Mr. DeLeon was arrested a
few weeks later.

"When all this came out, Jazmin
changed," her mother said. "She was
happy, dancing around, talking to
people."

The teen-ager finally came out of
her room. She would help Mrs.
Vasquez cook and even tried gar-
dening.

Each year, about 1,000 sexual-
abuse cases involving children are
referred to district attorneys in
Massachusetts. The Lawrence Gen-
eral Hospital emergency room sees
about 50 cases a year. Many more go
unreported, experts say.

"I know I'm not the only person
out there that this has happened to,"
Jazmin said. "Anyone who has kept
it a deep, dark secret should bring it
into the light."