

Unlicensed Mental Therapists Accused of Sexual Abuses

By IVER PETERSON

Accounts of emotional abuse and sexual exploitation were presented yesterday at a packed hearing into "quackery and alleged sexual misconduct" by the state's unregulated mental health therapists.

Former patients and the spouses and parents of patients told the hearing of heavy expenses, of children alienated from their families. They said that the unlicensed mental therapists dismissed objections to such treatment as proof of their own mental problems.

"Miss M," a 29-year-old witness, told the hearing that her Upper West Side therapist first inveigled her into having sexual relations with him as part of her \$20-a-session treatment and then engaged in "a lot of sadism."

"He would hit me, hit me on my breast and bang my head on the floor, and when I complained, he said I really have problems with healthy play," she testified.

Depression and Suicide

In a sworn statement played back by tape recorder, a young widow told how her late husband, a lawyer, had slipped into a deep depression during his therapy and, after an unsuccessful attempt, finally committed suicide.

Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz called the hearings at 80 Centre Street to present the witnesses as part of the evidence his office collected in a six-month investigation of unregulated psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, groups leaders and marriage counselors in the state.

None of these titles are at present covered by any laws or regulations. The purpose of the hearings, Mr. Lefkowitz said, is to guide the state in formulating a possible licensing bill to regulate these activities.

Only the titles of psychiatrist, psychologist, and social worker are regulated under current law.

Mr. Lefkowitz heard strong pleas from the heads of a number of medical and psychological associations for a

stiff licensing law to regulate the apparently growing number of "freelance" mental health practitioners.

But arguments were also presented by representatives of the unregulated practitioners, who deplored the evidence of mental and sexual abuse of patients but pointed out that such misconduct was known to have taken place with licensed psychiatrists and psychologists as well.

"Greed and lust, where they occur, do not vanish in the face of governmental supervision or higher education," said Prof. Matthew Besdine, president of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, in his testimony urging a "tough" licensing bill that would impose stronger standards for all mental-health workers.

Morton Schillinger, executive director of the New York State Psychological Association, presented what he described as evidence that a "network" of mental-health therapists had spread out across the state from a single, early lay therapy center that opened in the city after World War II.

Dr. Schillinger, who has been a persistent opponent of unregulated therapists, charged that members of the "network" had deceived their clients by using such titles as "doctor" and "Ph.D." without having degrees from accredited institutions.

Colter Rule, a physician who trains unlicensed practitioners, defended the work of "self help" group therapists who lack formal academic training. He argued that there were not enough regular psychiatrists and psychologists to serve the mental health needs of society, and added:

"Academic standards as the sole criteria for competence obviously will not protect the public from quackery, but it will prevent many talented people from providing human services without which society as we know it will not survive."