

ABUSED

and abandoned

Child abuse fortified by the mystique of satanic rituals has become an epidemic in several Western countries, and now in Australia. But once saved from the clutches of their tormentors, the children are seldom believed.

Yvonne Preston asks why a horrifying crisis has failed to excite the passions of the Left and public authorities alike.

On the West we take a decidedly jaundiced view of Pakistan's Moslem laws which require a woman charging rape to produce four male Moslem witnesses to the act before her story is accepted. If, as is more than likely, she can produce no witnesses to her ordeal, she risks landing in jail herself, accused of the 'crime' of adultery. Primitive as this sounds to us, our supposedly 'superior' Western cultures are rather less than enlightened when it comes to the truthfulness of women and children.

Freudian notions have perpetuated the slander. The word of a woman has had to be proved and the testimony of a child has carried even less weight. Where the charge has been physical abuse by a male, and the culprit, as is often the case, is the woman's husband or the child's father, the boundaries of belief have been pushed to the limit. Personal testimony has seldom been enough by itself. Corroborative evidence, preferably provided by a male has been required.

The law no longer sees women and children as male property, but it still sees them as lesser beings. All too often the female or child victims of men's violence and sexual

abuse in Western society find themselves transformed by a blind and disbelieving system into victimisers, accused of bearing false and malicious testimony against innocent men. All too commonly hysteria is said to be at the root of allegations of abuse by women and children. Victims of the newly acknowledged and horrifying fact of organised abuse of children, of sex rings which depend on recruiting children for the gratification of abusers, and of ritualised sex abuse with its cult of sexual terrorism and sacrifice are accused of fantasising, or cruelly dismissed as liars. Should the evidence of these victims of organised and ritual abuse be taken down by social workers or police and should it come anywhere near being heard in a court of law, it may be dismissed as "contaminated", while the child tormentors go free.

A Sydney woman who alleged that her two small children had suffered ritual sex abuse at a Christian Sunday School was told by child protection agencies that the children's stories of oral and anal abuse at gross satanic rituals were the result of "vivid imaginations".

The mother claims that the girl was forced into oral sex, the boy anally abused in macabre ceremonies which have echoes in cases from countries as far apart as Britain, the United States and the Netherlands. The alleged abuser's elderly mother took part in the ritual which included the sacrifice of animals. The children called her "the hag".

Their horrified mother took the story to the Department of Family and Community Services and now alleges that officers of the department questioned her mental health. Her allegations were rejected by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Robert Webster, but the mother and her de facto husband, the children's stepfather, under-

"A theatre of sexual terrorism has been revealed"

went psychiatric examination to prove their mental stability, so strongly did they believe their sanity was being questioned.

The children were six and seven at the time of the abuse. How had they learned this stuff, the mother wants to know. She says there is evidence they had been drugged. They talked about being given "magic crystals" and feeling sleepy. At first police refused to take up her case, arguing that the dismissal of charges against a couple accused of ritually abusing small children in a northern beaches kindergarten before the magistrate even heard the children's evidence, deeming it to be "contaminated", would make prosecution impossible. The so-called Mr Bubbles case did not establish legal precedent, nor set any age restriction on the victim in any police investigation, lawyers say, but the fact that it is perceived to have done so, sending to the community the message that children under seven cannot be considered competent witnesses, has served to inhibit prosecution in abuse cases, extending still further the boundaries of disbelief, compounding society's refusal to accept that "such things go on". Police eventually took this mother's allegation seriously enough to give the family a whole new identity and move it to a distant address for its own protection.

The Minister for Family and Community Services wrote to the woman expressing his sympathy for the personal difficulties she and her children faced in coping with such a traumatic experience, commenting that "child sex ritual abuse is an extremely complex and distressing form of abuse of children for everyone involved". Police Minister Ted Pickering wrote of his understanding of "the trauma being experienced by you and your children". But if the establishment at least was inclined to believe her—one step in the right direction—it failed totally to act. The Public Prosecutor informed the outraged mother that he would



not be proceeding with the case because of "insufficient evidence". Her son was too young to stand up to cross-examination, he said. He would be easily confused and the case would be lost.

Thus is the fact of ritual abuse officially if reluctantly acknowledged, the trauma accepted and the suffering of children admitted. Yet the perpetrators remain free, a threat, as the mother rightly says, to other innocent children to whom no-one seems to give a second thought.

Over the last two decades child protection workers have had to come to grips with the phenomenon of child battering and then to acknowledge the fact of widespread sexual abuse and the need to act against it. Both crimes are committed most frequently within the family, where all children are most vulnerable. Whole structures of care were put in place to deal with "normal" or "ordinary" sexual abuse, though frequently they broke down and failed to provide full protection for children. In the notorious Cleveland case in the UK, the dedicated people who sought to protect innocent young children, many of them only babies, were pilloried by society, attacked as fanatics and destroyers of families, their professional lives left in tatters.

In the last few years a further discovery has been made, more horrifying even than the crimes of child battering and "normal" sex abuse. The uncovering of evidence of organised or ritual abuse of children has revealed a theatre of sexual terrorism, a discovery which is providing "a real measure of the balance of power in society, not only between adults and children, but between the institutes and the children's advocates," writes Beatrix Campbell, feminist and long-time campaigner for the rights of women and children. "It puts to the test our promises to protect children," she says, unconsciously echoing the bitter and angry sentiments of the Sydney mother who says the evidence of her children's abuse ought properly to galvanise society into action to protect other children still at risk while the perpetrators remain at large.

In the United States where the existence of satanic cults systematically recruiting, abusing and even sacrificing the lives of small children to their bizarre rites has long been recognised, a mountain of evidence has accumulated. An ex-FBI agent has conducted a lengthy, and often dangerous investigation into practising satanic cults, in interviewing adult survivors of abuse rituals who tell gruesome tales of animal sacrifice, child murder and sexual assault on children. Many cases of such abuse occur in kindergartens, documented in the standard text *Nursery Crimes* by David Finkelhor. The FBI investigator says the crimes inflicted by these people are comparable to the crimes of the Nazis in World War Two. He claims that in the United States children are kidnapped off the streets, or picked up from among the homeless fleeing orphanages or children's homes. Tens of thousands of people disappear every year in America, he says, never to be heard of again. Satanists in the United States come from all professions and have infiltrated all walks of life. There are links with drug dealing, prostitution and the rich pornography and snuff movie "industries". "Occult crime is a reality."

Decent citizens would prefer to believe such things do not happen. How to credit that adults dress up and practise arcane and brutal ceremonies in this civilised day and age? The ritual of war in the Middle East, where morality is subverted and overwhelmingly destructive force unleashed on hapless civilians in the name of God and democracy points, if such pointer were needed, to the limitless capacity for man's inhumanity to man. Beatrix Campbell adds her own distinctive explanation: "People pray in front of grown men wearing frocks, and presumably to find both peace and power, they consume, metaphorically, the body of a man. So is it so difficult to believe that inversions of that established religion are to be found at large? If grown men are capable of dressing up in pinnies and sharing secret signs with each other in masonic lodges up and down the country, what is so hard about contemplating the prospect of grown men dressing up in daff costumes to invert the meanings of the dominant faith; organising rituals to penetrate any orifice available in troops of little children; to cut open rabbits, or cats, or people, and drink their blood; to shit on silver trays and make the children eat it?"

A member of a special investigating unit in the United States said occult crime should be seen as the outcome of the decline in rationalism, disenchantment with traditional religion, the influence of Eastern religions, parapsychology, the popularity of pseudo-satanic heavy metal music and the proliferation of occult literature. He said cult investigators have found evidence of human behaviour so degraded and disgusting that any right thinking person would be sickened.

The ritual and the abuse of the satanic cultists is designed to terrify, confuse and, above all, exert power over the powerless. Many cases have been reported in Australia. Most victims present initially too terrified to tell the tale, which leaks out slowly, if at all, over long periods of time. Some abused children find refuge in the fragmentation of personality which enables them to switch the burden of intolerable suffering away from themselves and on to somebody else. Most victims have been warned that they will be killed, like the animal or even human sacrifices they say they have seen, if they tell. There are special "kindergarten threats" against small children who are told they have a bomb in their tummies and if they tell the bomb will explode. The problem of acceptance may be less implausibility than a case of the consequences of these practices being unbearable. Even to think of them is intolerable.

In Australia, where acceptance of the unacceptable lags behind America, and scepticism is still widespread, some authoritative voices match those coming out of the United States, claiming the horrors to be fact not fantasy. At the 11th Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, held last year in Melbourne, a doctor of forensic medicine said criminal cults were providing a milieu for "evil" people to carry out disgusting and bizarre acts for which they would probably never be prosecuted. Dr Edward Ogden, of the Victoria Police Force office of forensic medicine, is doing an MA thesis on satanic cults. He told the congress about children having abortions, infants whose births were never

registered being used as human sacrifices, and adolescents being hired for sexual exploitation or used in sexual rituals. He reiterated the major contributor to the scepticism which greets allegations like those made by the Sydney mother; the offences are so bizarre people have difficulty believing them.

A Sydney policeman involved in satanic cult investigation has found a correlation between the high days of a satanic calendar and increased incidence of missing children. David Poulton, a retired federal policeman who has been investigating cults for 15 years and has interviewed 200 people, either child victims or participants, says there are many covens, a high degree of child abuse, children abused with alcohol and drugs, and many child sacrifices. Children are kidnapped, babies born into covens, their demise needing no death certificate because their birth is never registered. A north coast clergyman and former military intelligence officer independently confirmed this view, though he stresses people should not become paranoid, but be on guard. Of society's scepticism he said: "How does a two-year-old describe fellatio? You might say one child had a vivid imagination, but when there are five children in one group, ten more in Holland and five in Belgium, any rational thinking person would say we must act to protect them."

To say it is one thing. To act quite another. Abused children are regularly denied justice in Australia's courts and a successful case has yet to be mounted to prosecute the occult criminal. Indeed, the idea of a successful prosecution of ritual abusers is almost a contradiction in terms, given the difficulty of collating, accepting and presenting child testimony, the absence of eye-witness to the crime, the cleverness of the criminals, the terrorisation of the victims, and the fact that it is easier to turn victim into villain fabricating falsehoods than to take his or her word. Above all is the inappropriateness of the adversarial court system for hearing these cases.

The very language of the court militates against the abused child. A study conducted by Mark and Roslin Brennan of the Riverina Literacy Centre in Wagga reports that "the language barrier is being exploited for the benefit of the defendant rather than safeguarding ways in which children can best express their knowledge and understanding of what is happening to them". Defence lawyers use tactics to undermine child witnesses during cross examination. Judges dismiss charges after arbitrary tests of a child's competence to understand truth from falsehood. Do you know what perjury means, they ask a ten-year-old, when most adults would be hard pressed to define an acceptable answer in the intimidating atmosphere of the courtroom.

The Brennans report a nine-year-old who was asked by a defence counsel: "Well I know, I understand that you say you have been talking to her today but you see what I am asking you is this, that statement suggests that you said those things that you now say are wrong to the police. Now did you say it to the police or did you not?" The befuddled child, not surprisingly, answered: "I don't know." The study concludes that children are not used to questions

being asked with the idea in mind that their responses can be manipulated for someone else's benefit, and that the someone else is the alleged offender.

How much more difficult for a child to appear a credible witness when his or her testimony alleges being forced to eat excrement or cat food, or seeing a baby killed or a live chicken have its legs and wings cut off, or being anally penetrated by a man wearing a black pointed hood, or lain on an altar and forced to have oral sex. It takes enormous courage for the terrorised child to tell at all. The problem is not, writes Beatrix Campbell, "that the stranger in the park is being resurrected in a new moral panic."

"How to credit that adults dress up and practise arcane and brutal ceremonies in this age."

"The problem is that unless and until some communal resistance is mobilised on the side of children and their advocates then their disclosures will always be disavowed."

As things stand, satanic rituals in a secular culture like Australia's are not taken seriously, and anyone who respects children's accounts of satanic or ritualised abuse are not taken seriously, either. There are special police investigating units, and glossy manuals of advice on child abuse investigation and management; evidence is accumulated and concern expressed. In fact, there should be a social outcry that these things are being done to our children, for at the self-interest level alone, they are storing up problems for the future at which we can only guess. But all too often, as Campbell says, the cries for help are not heeded. Any outcry there is tends to come from male columnists who warn, not against the terrorisation and brutalisation of our next generation, but against "witch-hunts" which are only too ready to see "a male conspiracy to abuse the female, with every man guilty until proved innocent (preferably by castration)".

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