

RITUAL ABUSE TORTURE

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Local Agency Aims to Bring Torture Practices to Light

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Friday, April 30, 2004 - A Westport-based agency is working to bring some "very dirty laundry" out of the closet and into the light of day. The Human Lactation Center has aligned itself with the work of Canadian activists Jeanne Sarson and Linda MacDonald, to create public awareness of the existence of Ritual Abuse Torture (RAT).

Sarson and MacDonald, who are registered nurses working in Nova Scotia, have been researching RAT for about 11 years. According to their studies, RAT occurs worldwide and is far more prevalent than people realize. "These crimes infiltrate all levels and sectors of society," MacDonald said. The pair presently is working on a book, *Torturers Walk Among Us*, which will be published next year. The experts describe RAT as "bizarre acts of an unusual, horrific nature" that extend beyond that of child abuse. "Ritual abuse torture is intentionally planned and organized kin and non-kin brutal group ritualisms," Sarson explained. "The heinous crimes are done almost exclusively to women and children, and it is physical, mental and emotional, sexual and/or spiritual torture, usually done by small, 'family' groups and often done in a ritual setting."

"We have identified these kinds of victimizations," MacDonald said. "Physical tortures cause extreme and excruciating pain, fear and terror of being killed, extreme exhaustion, permanent loss, disability and/or disfigurement; sexualized torture involves the use of objects and/or animals, forced nakedness and group rapes; and mind-spirit torture causes the child victim torment and results in the distortion of their personality, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, behaviors and world view. The infant, toddler, child, youth or captive adult may endure any or all of these atrocities."

MacDonald noted that in many cases RAT perpetrators are members of the immediate family or those who appear publicly as role models, such as clergymen, Scout leaders and doctors. She added that RAT may begin during a victim's infancy and continue through adulthood. "The child RAT victim is commonly exploited and trafficked, sold or rented into the pedophilic pornography/prostitution/sex tourism or drug trades," MacDonald said. "The child victims endure forced involvement in such sham/real acts as the killing of pet animals, necrophilic rituals and bestiality"

Through their research, Sarson and MacDonald have discovered that RAT victims have psychological parallels with concentration camp and Holocaust

survivors. "These are all atrocities against humanity," Sarson said. "These are people who have come face-to-face with human evil. They have endured a belief system based in hatred."

RAT destroys a person's dignity and impairs the abilities of victims to live balanced or thriving lives, noted MacDonald. However, the torment continues because victims are reluctant to come forward.

"The victims are silenced in many ways," MacDonald said. "Often, they are threatened with pain or death if they tell on their abusers. Conversely, when RAT incidents are reported, there is skepticism that these events really occurred. Reports are dismissed as being an exaggeration or a product of an overactive imagination." The dismissal comes easily to the masses, Sarson said. "Horrific crimes are difficult to present," she said. "People refuse to believe that these things can really happen. Believing that horrors like this can happen undermines a sense of stability."

She added that the perpetrators of these crimes are generally people who hold a position of power over their victims. "Often, pedophiles are parents who use mind control to maintain a secrecy," Sarson said. "These people make use of power, pleasure and profit to commit heinous crimes."

Westport's Human Lactation Center is hoping to help spread the word about the existence of RAT as a means of defeating it. "We are involved in education that empowers, protects and nurtures women and children, according to Jan Kraft, assistant to the director. "Educating the public on the phenomenon of ritual abuse torture is a powerful first step in healing and intervention," she said. "How can a society deal with human evil if they do not believe it exists?"

The Human Lactation Center was co-founded by Dr. Dana Raphael, a medical anthropologist, and the late anthropologist, Margaret Meade. For years the agency focused internationally on issues of breastfeeding, but has shifted its focus to include issues of sexual abuse torture and its effects on women and children. The center collaborated with Sarson and MacDonald last month on "The Many Faces of Torture," a presentation made during the annual conference of the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women. The presentation addressed the medical, psychological, anthropological, legal and abuse aspects of torture.

The center additionally is preparing for future presentations, undertaking lobbying efforts as well as working with related agencies, including Amnesty International.

The thrust, at present, is to bring RAT to light so that intervention processes can be implemented. "Human education programs are a means of combatting RAT," said MacDonald. "RAT victims need respect, support and justice. Teaching children about the evil that exists in this world is the

equivalent of showing them how to look both ways before crossing a street. We are mounting an informational campaign. We hope to move against the perpetrators through the justice systems and the health ministries of all nations." For information on RAT, call the Human Lactation Center at 259-5995 or visit the Web site www.ritualabusetorture.org.

To report instances of RAT or child abuse in Connecticut, call a 24-hour help line at (888) 999-5545. All calls are private.

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