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CHAPTER 4

UNDER-ACKNOWLEDGED FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Some forms of violence merit special attention because so often women are not believed when they describe their experiences in these areas. They have nowhere to turn to for support and very few services exist to respond to their needs properly. Ritual abuse, stalking, pornography and abuse of power and misuse of reproductive technologies are forms of violence that almost defy understanding or solutions. As in all forms described in this report, the violence inherent in these activities is committed precisely because of women's gender and overall unequal status in society. It is about the desire to gain power and control over another human being. There is a particular urgency to address these problems.

RITUAL ABUSE

We do not know the full dimensions of ritual abuse in this country. We do not know all the dynamics involved, the international connections or relationships between different regions and different cults. The Panel did, however, hear from many women from all regions of Canada who named themselves as survivors of ritual abuse. Through their compelling testimony, a phenomenon of violence was detailed that urgently requires recognition in Canada.

Ritual abuse is defined as a combination of severe physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse used systematically and in combination with symbols, ceremonies and/or group activities that have a religious, magical or supernatural connotation. Victims are terrorized into silence by repetitive abuse over time and indoctrinated into the beliefs and practices of the cult or group.⁶²

There are no statistics on ritual abuse in Canada. There is an overwhelming inclination on the part of many people to deny the experiences of those who have survived ritual abuse. This is not surprising given the hideous nature of these crimes.

Disbelief protects people from their own fears, disgust, horrors and often their own memories and realities. And it stops them from listening. When a violent, gruesome movie or television show attracts millions of viewers, this is considered normal behaviour, yet when survivors of ritual abuse speak out about having survived torture, ... repeated rapes, and of witnessing ritual murder, we are told it's not possible, that we must be either lying or crazy.⁶³

It has taken 20 years of concerted effort by women's groups and by survivors of abuse, incest and rape to make people aware of the prevalence of violence against women. It appears that it will, unfortunately, take time to convince people of the reality of the atrocities committed by ritual abusers. There is a clear parallel between the long-standing disbelief of sexual abuse survivors and the present disbelief of ritual abuse survivors.

The costs of society's denial and tolerance of ritual abuse have been very high for its victims. Some have paid with their lives. Others are consumed by their struggle to survive, as they attempt to deal with flashbacks of the tortuous abuse they experienced and the very real fear of injury and death from dangerous perpetrators. Active cult members threaten and harm survivors in a multitude of ways, including triggering programming induced when the survivor was a child.

This was a generational cult that is linked and connected throughout the country. They use programming and brainwashing. I recently met a member from the past. She said two words to me and all I knew is that I felt like killing somebody. Cults are big business. They're involved with drugs, child porn, "snuff" movies and white slavery. It's hard to recall what happened and who is involved because you're fragmented into so many parts that you don't remember. I'm