

Women paid a high price for disclosing; one was clear she would have to go to bed for a few days to recover from the trauma of telling us her experiences. Some found they had to communicate with the Panel by tape or through a different personality to cope with the threats and to escape the intense programming that still holds them captive.

For others there has been ongoing harassment by cult members. Some have had to leave their homes and sever all ties with their communities to take up an unenviable existence living "underground."

Not only survivors of ritual abuse but their therapists as well have been the targets of organized efforts to discount the experiences of violence. Incredibly, there are those who assert that survivors' memories are false, and some go on to charge that therapists are deliberately planting false details into the psyche of patients. It was clear from the experiences related by survivors who came to speak with the Panel that they have been further injured by encountering disbelief and denial.

As with all survivors of abuse, the strength of the human spirit is remarkable. Ritual abuse survivors talked to the Panel about the flashbacks they lived with, as well as their coping mechanisms which often overpowered the most sophisticated of programming techniques used by the cult. Most used coping techniques to "ground" themselves or help themselves return to the present from flashbacks. Some described the ways in which they had to cope with the ignorance of medical staff if they were hospitalized and were refused whatever they needed in trying to cope with triggers or to ground themselves in the present — often with something like a cigarette or cup of tea that "was against the rules." Some were put at risk of self injury as a result.

Among the ritual abuse survivors the Panel met were women with many diverse experiences. Some said they were struggling with multiplicity; all had found it extremely difficult to find any useful therapeutic help. Many had painful stories of all the unhelpful therapy and medical treatment they had endured while trying to cope at the same time with the impacts of the knowledge of the abuse they had endured.

Therapeutic responses to survivors of ritual abuse have been limited in not only their effectiveness but in their very existence, because therapists are not taught about ritual abuse in their training. The treatment of multiplicity is necessarily long term. Only very recently has a preliminary Canadian study found that the most extreme forms of multiplicity can not only be distinguished from less complex forms but their treatment can be differentiated as taking longer, with a completion time of around six years. This is an important insight. Deprogramming techniques that are reported to be successful are being used with cult survivors in both Canada and the United States.

There is no specific recognition of the crimes associated with ritual abuse in the Criminal Code and very limited levels of understanding by law enforcement officers, legal practitioners and adjudicators. It is not surprising then, that prosecution of these crimes is also very limited and rarely successful. In the meantime, the safety of women and children from perpetrators of ritual abuse is dangerously limited, and survivors of ritual abuse do not, therefore, enjoy the equal benefit and protection of the law.

Doctors, counsellors and therapists working with ritual abuse survivors also must deal with discrediting, denial and disbelief from the medical profession and their own professional communities. This can affect their clients and patients in a number of ways. For example, one of the few therapists in this field might reluctantly stop working with survivors because of burnout, the impossible conditions of practice or the closure of a service.

Survivors of ritual abuse continue to pay a high price for the disbelief they encounter. Without recognition and support it will be impossible for many to come to terms with their experiences. Adding further pain to those who have already been so injured seems at odds with any notion of a just or a more equitable society.

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 Source: - Changing the Landscape: Ending
 Violence ~ Achieving Equality. Status
 of Women Canada
 ISBN # 0-660-151448, Catalogue No.
 SW45-1/1983

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