

The Making of a Satanic Myth

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Rosie Waterhouse, Independent On Sunday, 12.08.90, p8 Adult "Survivors" tell horrific tales of ritual child abuse but the evidence is missing. Rosie Waterhouse reports.

ON A PSYCHIATRIST's couch at the Fort Royal Medical Centre in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, in September 1976, after a miscarriage and 200 hours of therapy, Michelle Smith began remembering. After 22 years she unearthed and re-lived deeply buried memories of her past. From the age of four Michelle had suffered appalling sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the hands of a coven of Satanists, including her own mother.

In bizarre black magic ceremonies she witnessed debauchery, murder, the sacrifice of babies, the mutilation of animals and the drinking of unspeakable substances including blood. The power of God was her ultimate salvation.

Michelle and her therapist Lawrence Pazder went to the Vatican to alert the church about previously unheard dangers to children from Satanic cults worldwide. To warn the world they wrote Michelle Remembers, published in 1980 and in Britain, by Michael Joseph the next year. Last week, at a conference on incest at a hospital in Harrow, north-west London, an Englishwoman who claimed she had been the victim for 16 years of ritual abuse by Satanists, told delegates that human fetuses were being killed and eaten by members of "Satanic sex rings".

Sue Hutchinson said that in the past six months she has dealt with 10 helpline calls a week from fellow survivors of Satanic abuse. Some of the 50 cases she was counselling involved cannibalism.

Women had told her how babies were induced before they were due, and sacrificed. Children were hung up by their feet and suspended over electric saws. They suffered all forms of sexual abuse including rape, buggery, and bestiality.

Ms Hutchinson's horrifying claims were supported by several speakers at the fourth international conference on Incest and Related Problems which took place over three days at Northwick Park Hospital. It received a great deal of publicity.

Vera Diamond, a Harley Street psychotherapist who co-organised the conference, said several children had been killed during Satanic rituals. Afterwards she told this newspaper she had treated 20 adult survivors of ritual abuse.

Norman Vaughton, a psychotherapist from Nottingham - where the biggest child abuse investigation in Britain last year led to the imprisonment of nine adults for incest and cruelty - said that there were an estimated 10,000 human sacrifices a year in America, most of them "foetuses that have been bred specially".

Newspapers reported that figure without any qualification. A couple of police officers present asked for corroborative evidence. But they accepted Satanic child abuse was probably happening in Britain, albeit on a small scale.

Over the past two years the British public has been hearing more and more about this new phenomenon as social workers, psychiatrists, therapists, the NSPCC, voluntary groups and churches all report a growing number of cases of Satanic, ritual abuse. But are these Satanic abuse survivors' stories fantasy or fact? Are children in Britain being sadistically abused and tortured by witches and Satanists in covens?

Are teenage girls being used as "brood mares", made pregnant and the foetus aborted so it can be sacrificed, and in some cases eaten? More and more child care specialists are telling us yes.

But an investigation by the Independent on Sunday has found that nobody has produced evidence to support these claims. There have been police investigations across the United States, in Canada, the Netherlands, and now in Britain. They have produced no evidence. No bodies, no bones, no covens, no underground tunnels, no animal carcasses, no bloodstains. Nothing. Just the occasional court case where the pretence of supernatural powers was used to obtain silence and submission.

There is, of course, no question that some children are sexually abused by adults. But why have an increasing number of professionals, police officers, charities, including the NSPCC, and clergy come to believe that there are covens of witches killing children and sacrificing babies?

Because children have described seeing horrors they surely could not have invented, and because exactly the same stories have been told in other countries. Our investigations have revealed that the Satanic abuse myth originated in the United States. It has been spread largely in fundamentalist Christian circles, and it is now accepted as fact by many psychotherapists and police officers. The allegations began to surface only after the publication of the book Michelle Remembers.

The co-author and psychiatrist Dr Pazder, who has since married Michelle, began organising "Satanic Cult Crime" seminars across the United States for therapists and the police. In the United States, Satanic cult panics began spreading and, from 1984 to 1989, 100 people nationwide were charged with ritual sex abuse.

Of those, about 50 were charged and half convicted of child abuse with no evidence other than the testimony of children, parents and experts explaining how children behave when they have been traumatised. No evidence of Satanism was found in these cases.

In other cases the allegations were dismissed as the worst outbreak of mass hysteria since the Salem witchhunt at the end of the seventeenth century. (During the course of the Salem trials, 141 people were arrested as suspects, 19 were hanged and one was pressed to death.)

In 1987, in the small town of Oude Pekala in the Netherlands, 100 children eventually told stories of Satanism and pornography. No corroborative evidence was found and the police concluded it was a case of mass hysteria.

So how did the Satanic child abuse myth spread and cross the Atlantic to Britain? In the United States, Robert Hicks, an analyst with the criminal justice department in Virginia who is writing a book on so called Satanic cult crime, blames "a loose network" of therapists, fundamentalist Christians, serving and ex-police officers and also the media for "perpetuating the myth". He told us: "There were no such stories before the publication of Michelle Remembers."

Dr. Sherrill Mulhern, an anthropologist from the University of Paris, who has studied self declared Satanic abuse survivors, said: "Michelle Remembers crystallised the Satanic abuse legend among psychotherapists. "Adult therapists began networking with one another and with child therapists.

I think the majority of adult survivors' accounts are the result of the interaction between the therapist, the patient and the surrounding Satanic cult stories. "The proponents of the rumour say all the survivors, adults and children, are saying the same thing. This is a paranoid reading of the data."

Kenneth Lanning, of the National Centre for the Analysis of Violent Crime at the FBI Academy in Virginia, wrote in a journal last October: "The law enforcement perspective cannot ignore the lack of physical evidence. Until hard evidence is obtained and corroborated, the American people should not be frightened into believing that babies are being bred and eaten, and that 50,000 missing children are being murdered in human sacrifices.

"Satanic and occult crime has become a growth industry; speaking fees, books, videos, prevention material, television and radio appearances."

Since the publication of Michelle Remembers, hundreds of women in the United States, many of them psychiatric cases undergoing therapy, have begun remembering Satanic abuse from their childhood.

Some are writing books, others are travelling the country addressing conferences, and many are telling church congregations how they were "saved" from Satan by dedicating their soul to God. Such a book was published in Britain in 1986. *Delivered to Declare*, by Gabriele Trinkle, published by Hodder and Stoughton, tells how she was sold to Satan as a six-month-old baby, subjected to depraved sexual abuse and witness to the sacrifice of babies.

The book was lent to this newspaper by a Church of England vicar from the Dulwich area of south-east London. It was to help to explain the story he had just related of the survivor of Satanic abuse who was sitting beside him. Feeling suicidal last New Year's Eve, the woman telephoned the vicar and asked for help. She has lived with the minister and his family ever since.

She suffered terrifying nightmares, and after eight months of gradual revelation she has come to believe - and so does the vicar - that she was initiated into a black magic coven in south-east London and dedicated to Satan in a ritual when she was a six-week-old baby; married to Satan when she was 11; raped by several members of the coven and also by demons; and witness to the sacrifice of animals and babies.

Some of these murders and depravities happened in a public park. Nobody noticed them (and this the vicar at first found hard to believe) because, she said, the power of Satan was so strong he was able to make them invisible.

Another British survivor is Audrey Harper, who describes herself as a former high priestess, who turned to Christ and now tours the country warning of the dangers of the occult. She now says she knows of 60 other survivors like herself in Britain.

Ms Harper began helping the Reachout Trust, a fundamentalist Christian charity run by Maureen Davies, a former nurse from Rhyl in North Wales. It is dedicated to helping people who have been involved with the occult and had begun to encounter other survivors of ritual abuse. Most are "born again" Christians.

The Reachout Trust sends out literature it receives from America on how to spot ritual abuse. Maureen Davies is consulted by police officers and social workers and has lectured at police training colleges and to church groups. Last year after setting up a helpline for survivors, she was invited to lecture in America with Larry Jones, a policeman who runs a newsletter on Satanic crime for Christian police officers in the US.

[Lt. Larry Jones, of the Boise, Idaho Police Department, publishes his hate literature and propaganda from the basement of his cult's church--something he doesn't mention in his cult newsletter called "File 18."

He believes Bob Larson's claim that 50,000 individuals a year are being murdered for "Satan," and "proves" it with bible quotes!] Information in Britain is also circulated by the Evangelical Alliance, which represents a million Christians in Britain.

The proponents of stories about Satanic abuse clearly believe it exists and dismiss suggestions that it is merely a myth, arguing that lack of physical evidence is simply because all traces are carefully destroyed.

[Ms. Davies once said "Sometimes no proof is proof! [of a conspiracy]" She is considered an "expert" in England.]

One case frequently cited by proponents of the Satanic abuse theory happened in Nottingham. In 1988, two social workers in the city were encountering a particularly vile case of incest involving nine adults and 23 children who had been taken into care.

According to Christine Johnston, a senior social worker, and Judith Dawson, the team leader, the children began telling bizarre stories which they could not understand. They called in Ray Wyre, a former probation officer who runs a clinic in Birmingham for sex offenders.

He gave them a list of "Satanic indicators", a profile of signs and symptoms used by American police officers which he told the Independent on Sunday he was given by Pamela Klein, a Chicago social worker who lectures on Satanic abuse.

Wyre had other literature on Satanic abuse from the United States, where he had first studied child abuse in 1984. He had picked up some of the material himself on a visit in 1988; other information he had been sent.

Mr Wyre says the social workers initially asked him if he knew anything about witchcraft because the children were writing strange things in their diaries. He said he told the social workers and foster parents the sort of things said by children who had been ritually abused.

Mr Wyre studied for three years in the early 1970s at a Baptist bible college in Birmingham to become ordained as a minister, but chose probation work instead. He said his former beliefs were not relevant to his work with sex offenders.

Ms Johnston and Ms Dawson also contacted Dr Russell Blacker, a consultant psychiatrist who is secretary and founder of the Association of Christian Psychiatrists. "They didn't know where to turn," he said.

Dr Blacker, based at a Cornish hospital, believes in the power of exorcism and says he also counsels adult survivors of Satanic abuse. In MARCH 1989 he organised a conference on the subject.

In September 1989 at a conference in Reading Ms Johnston and Ms Dawson first made public their belief that the Nottingham children, whose abusers had been jailed, had been victims of Satanic abuse. But the police could find no evidence.

A joint inquiry team of police and social workers was set up by the chief constable of Nottingham and the chief executive of the county council. In an unpublished 650-page report, obtained by Central Television in Nottingham, the team found no evidence of ritualistic abuse.

The report says most of the evidence arose as a result of therapeutic methods. For instance, one member of the team said, limited choice questions included "you killed three or 30 babies?"

The report concludes: "We are all aware it is easy to criticise with the benefit of hindsight. However, we are concerned that two years later an unshakable belief in Satanic ritualistic abuse appears to have developed which could easily lead into a modern day witchhunt, as has happened in the US."