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Ritual Abuse: An European Cross-Country Perspective

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## **Ritual Abuse: An European Cross-Country Perspective**

Before we start with our presentation we have to point out two statements.

First is that we do not make a diagnosis of Ritual Abuse. Even 'sexual abuse' or 'kidnapping' are not diagnoses. But all these three terms have at least two things in common: They are crimes and they can cause severe traumatic stress.

Second: we started out with the idea of giving an overview about the situation in Europe. We are in touch with colleagues from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Austria and Switzerland. Due to time limitations we have decided to focus only on the United Kingdom and Germany.

### **Ritual Abuse in the U.K.**

*Joan Coleman*

I have only a few minutes in which to talk about 12 years' study of ritual abuse in the UK. Both before and after retiring from National Health Services employment, I worked closely with several adult survivors. For nearly nine years I have been co-ordinator of RAINS, the Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support. There have been altogether about 400 members. Some move on, but new ones are constantly joining.

RAINS supports professionals of any discipline who are working with ritual abuse and all applications for membership come through me. I therefore hear many accounts from therapists and carers regarding those whom they support. Survivors also ring RAINS, and although it is not meant as a helpline for them, it is impossible to slam the door in their faces, so great is their need. We receive calls, in addition, from police officers, lawyers and journalists who have encountered ritual abuse and are often less sceptical than some mental health professionals.

SAFE, another organisation, is a telephone helpline specifically for victims of ritual abuse. They receive over 1000 calls a year from survivors, of which, on average, one a week are first time calls.

I am defining ritual abuse here as

Severe and systematic physical, sexual and psychological abuse and torture of one or more children, adolescents and adults, usually by a number of perpetrators, in which rituals are used, not only to intimidate and control the victim(s), but also as an essential part of a belief system.

Satanist abuse falls within the definition and although since the government survey by the anthropologist Jean La Fontaine, it is not considered prudent or politic to mention Satanism, the vast majority of survivors and therapist who ring SAFE and RAINS are talking just about that.

Satanist abuse can be defined more descriptively as:

Severe and systematic abuse of one or more children, adolescents or adults, usually by a number of perpetrators of both sexes, frequently over a period of many years. It is associated with a belief system involving the worship of Satan. It includes sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual abuse, especially of young children, often within ceremonies in which rituals, symbols and so-called magic are employed. Control is the essential feature. Indoctrination and mind-control are achieved with the aid of Dissociation, induced by using drugs, hypnosis, cognitive deception, torture, humiliation, enforced perpetration and blackmail. In the cases of generational Satanism, much of the procedure is carried out at home by members of the family.

Although I, like most RAINS members, do not believe in a personified devil, there is no doubt that some people do. Even La Fontaine acknowledges that satanists do exist, but she reckons they are intelligent professional people who do not abuse children; whereas the alleged perpetrators in her survey came from bleak housing estates and she referred them as 'the marginal poor'.

This does not correspond with our experience which is that far as occupation and class are concerned, satanists fall right across the board. 'The marginal poor' are the ones that social services have access to, but we are constantly hearing of others from the professional classes who do not advertise their allegiance to Satan, but

who, we are told, do abuse both children and adults.

Children recruited in ritual abuse may not, initially, be aware of the religious significance, but most survivors who claim they were born into and abused within generational Satanism, tell us that they were taught from a very early age that Satan was their god. All those that I worked with were under no illusions as to what it was about. They talked about 'the cult' as other people may talk about the Church or a political party. Although individual memories had been repressed or dissociated, the awareness of Satanism was not a recovered memory. They had always recognised that this was the background to their personal trauma, that made them feel different from other people. This is in accordance with the experience of Valerie Sinason and her work in the Clinic for Dissociative Studies. They have already assessed 160 cases of alleged ritual abuse and have found that although some individual memories had been recovered, the fact of their abuse had, in the majority of cases, never been forgotten. So, on the whole, recovered memories were not a prominent feature.

I have spoken, throughout the years, to at least eighty survivors of ritual abuse and there are obviously many more that I have not encountered, judging by the number of past and present members of RAINS. Nonetheless, the official attitude of the Department of Health, quoting from their Consultation Document for the revised edition of Working Together to Safeguard Children, is that '*Confirmed cases in which there was corroborative evidence of ritual abuse were extremely rare, and evidence that adults had performed rituals of recognisably occult significance was virtually non-existent*'. I'm not sure what evidence of Satanic belief system one would expect to find; most Satanists don't publicise their beliefs, nor display their artifacts; and most people don't know what to look for and look too late. But I must emphasise that ritual abuse is not simply a matter of ceremonies and paraphernalia. It is a daily procedure in the homes of Satanic cult members.

Children are sexually abused and tortured both physically and psychologically as a matter of course; they are forced to be subjects of pornographic videos as well as child prostitution. Some are made dependant on hard drugs, often by their own parents and many teenage girls are impregnated and aborted.

Horrific crimes are committed in the name of Satanism and, by concentrating too much on the therapeutic aspects, we may be in danger of forgetting this. We must

remember that survivors only become patients because of the appalling things that have been done to them – not because they are mentally ill. Of course they dissociate. That is how they survived as young children. And inevitably they suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But treatment, although very necessary, is only a part of it. If we think that is all that is needed, we are just papering over the cracks. We must not pathologise the victims to the extent of ignoring the crimes, and although Satanic ceremonies are not crimes in themselves, plenty of their other activities are. So we need to be well informed about all of these.

Dissociative Identity Disorder occurs when trauma is frequent, sustained and exceptionally severe; and when it begins at a very young age. Generational ritual abuse fulfills all these criteria. In addition, the deliberate cognitive confusion and distortion are highly conducive to dissociation. Again, this is supported by the work of the Clinic for Dissociative Studies. The cases that were assessed, in which ritual abuse was alleged, nearly all showed very high levels of dissociation. Yet, some who work in Dissociative Disorders scarcely acknowledge ritual abuse as an entity. This would appear to be the result of fear, rather than ignorance, but such fear must be overcome. Otherwise we are betraying those survivors who mastered their own terror sufficiently to entrust us with their stories.

For years, Satanic cults have relied on public scepticism to enable them to continue their practices with impunity. Obviously, none of us wants to return to the days of the Salem witch trials; but until Mental Health professionals acknowledge ritual abuse as a reality, and recognise the vital importance of educating other disciplines, such as the police and legal profession, as well as the general public, there is little chance of any government providing resources for intensive investigations and appropriate treatment. The most effective deterrent for the perpetrators must surely be through careful and thorough detection leading to decisive criminal convictions.

## **Ritual Abuse in Germany**

*Thorsten Becker*

My name is Thorsten Becker. I am a socialworker from Lueneburg in Germany. I

have specialised in cult-counselling -especially on Satanism- for about 15 years.

In 1992 I had the first two cases of alleged Ritual Abuse with detailed accounts from young children of physical and sexual abuse during satanic rituals. I was asked by the police, and nobody I know had heard about things like this before. Even despite corroborative evidence the law-enforcement failed to achieve a successful investigation, which leaves many open questions - similar to the Nottingham, Broxtowe-Case here in England. These were two of the first reports in Germany. Now --1999-- I am nearly fulltime working on the problem of RA - I will come back to this issues later on.

Before I start with my presentation on Ritual Abuse in Germany I want to give you one reminder. The DSM-IV specifies a "Religious and Spiritual Problem" in the category of "other clinical relevant problems". My question is: Who --as a therapist-- is able or educated to handle this problem properly, especially in cases which are connected to physical and sexual abuse and severe traumatic stress? And there are a lot cases in which this problem is addressed. Currently in former Yugoslavia the ongoing genocide by the Serbian army and police is the first time in the history of war where rape is used consciously as a weapon - addressed to the religious beliefs of the Muslim families. It is my professional opinion that this will create serious problems for mental health professionals throughout Europe: Working on severe trauma connected to severe problems on religious issues -- we have to keep this in mind for the following.

Ritual Abuse -- Joan Coleman gave an explanation I would like to follow with a few additions. In Germany we avoid speaking about Ritual Abuse, we try to change to the term 'Ritual Violence' for several reasons. Nevertheless:

- ◆ Ritual Abuse is intended to traumatise the victims
- ◆ Ritual Abuse may have an ideological background as well as being staged for the purpose of deception and threat.

I want to emphasise the last point -- usually a victim --especially a child-- is not able to decide whether the abuse is really ideologically based or staged. The effect or impact on the victim is the same.

And once again we have the aspect of problems with basic belief-systems and

purpose in life. It is my understanding that this enhances the difficulties compared to other traumatised patients and it is my professional opinion that this is a problem which should be handled with multiprofessional cooperation.

It took about five years to develop a form of multiprofessional cooperation in Germany. Ritual Abuse cases appeared in counselling agencies for victims of sexual abuse, in the counselling concerning cults and among therapists who work with dissociative patients -- all of them separated from the others.

In 1995 the German Section of the ISSD was started and cooperation developed from there. The 6-monthly meetings of the German section, which are open for professionals who are not ISSD-members as well, became the basis for information exchange, mainly among the workgroups who are part of every ISSD-meeting. The workgroup on what may be translated "*Ideological Based Rings of Perpetrators*" started at the first meeting and is the only workgroup that meets aside from the ISSD-conferences. Through the contacts which have been established here, a good networking on counselling for counsellors and therapists / clinicians as well as law-enforcement professionals has developed

In 1997 the ISSD-members Ulla Froehling, journalist and author of "*Vater unser in der Hoelle - 'Our Father which art in hell'*"<sup>1</sup> called the "first in-depth German study of a DID-patient with a background of severe home abuse, child prostitution, and sadistic ritual abuse"<sup>2</sup>; and Michaela Huber, therapist and author of a bestselling-handbook on Multiple Personality Disorder<sup>3</sup> conducted a first 'ad hoc' study on Ritual Abuse in Germany. Thanks to them I can present some of their findings at this conference:

They sent 355 questionnaires throughout Germany, 126 returned and 113 have been evaluated. Every 'maybe' or 'perhaps' was excluded, which led to a total of 354 cases in treatment -- 299 in current treatment -- of Ritual Abuse in Germany. These

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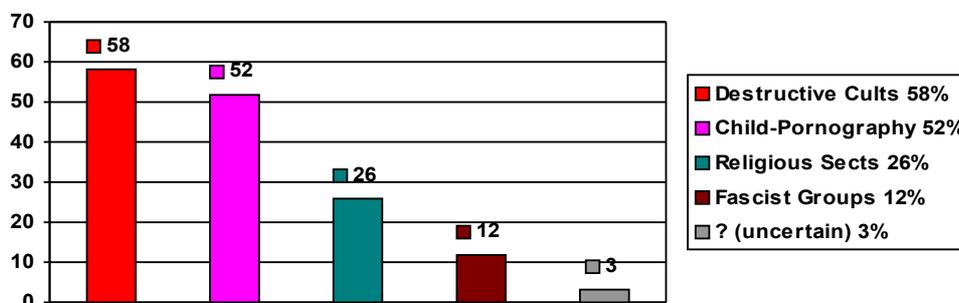
<sup>1</sup> Froehling, Ulla: *Vater unser in der Hoelle*; Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1996

<sup>2</sup> van der Hart et al: *Ritual Abuse in European countries: A clinician's perspective*; in: Fraser, GA; *The Dilemma of Ritual Abuse*; Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1997, p. 146

<sup>3</sup> Huber, Michaela: *Multiple Persoenlichkeiten – Ueberlebende extremer Gewalt*; Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995

patients or clients were treated at 61 locations in Germany.

***Ritual Abuse in Germany:  
Background of 354 cases in treatment***



© U. Froehling + M. Huber

Destructive Cults (red) 58 %:

- most of them are cases from a Satanic background
- but there are some Gnostic-occult groups as well

Child-Pornography (magenta) 52 %:

- reports of being videotaped and filmed

Religious sects (green) 26 %:

- most of them are so-called Christian groups
- which are partly abusive through exorcism-rituals

Fascist groups (brown) 13 %:

- most of them based on Nazi-ideology

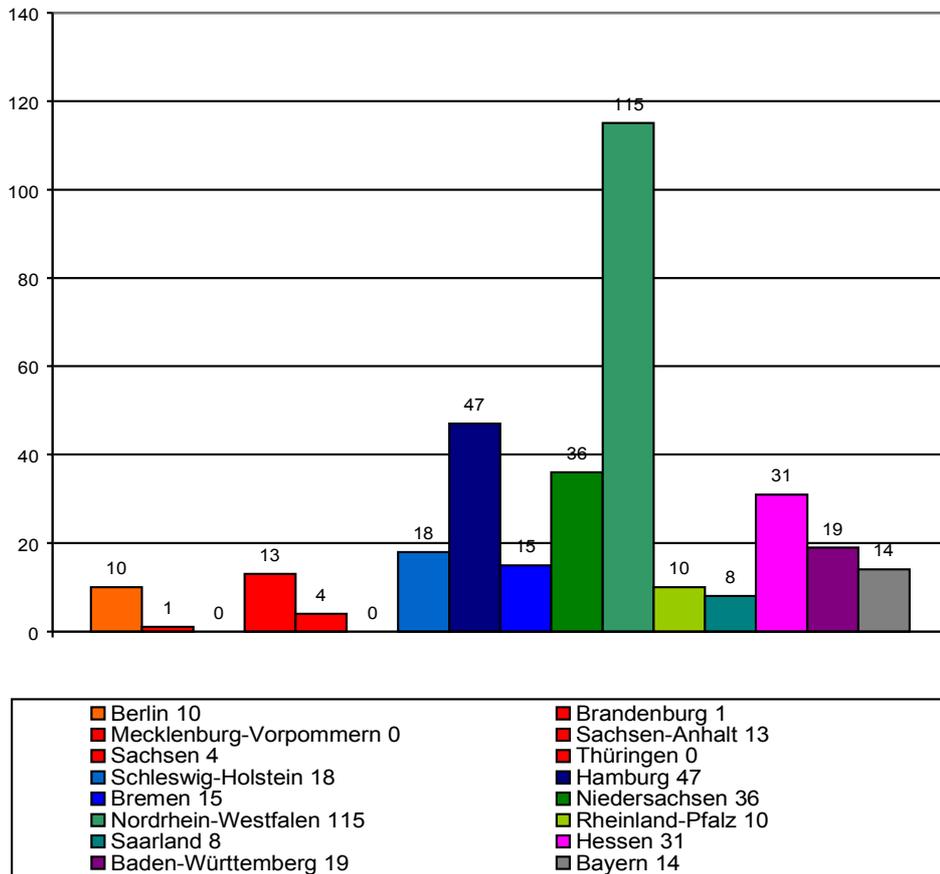
Uncertain (grey) 3 %:

- sadistic abuse in group-settings without a remarkable ideological setting

If you add this all together it is 151 percent. This simply means that more than half of the victims are being abused in more than one category. Most of the combinations are Satanism (!) and child-pornography, but Satanism as occurs with Fascist background in several cases.

Where did this happen?

***Ritual Abuse in Germany:  
Cases in different states***



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- ◆ a minority of cases are found in the former German Democratic Republic / East-Germany (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen, Sachsen) (red)
- ◆ green: states with border on the Netherlands. Belgium, Luxemburg and France (Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland)
- ◆ Nordrhein-Westfalen is the biggest state in Germany and has a very high profile concerning trauma-treatment

I have to add, that both organisations I work for, "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kinder- und Jugendschutz (ajs)" in Hamburg, a non-governmental organisation on child- and youth protection, and S.PORG.-Consulting in Lueneburg, where my colleague and I had worked on a special project on counselling on Ritual Abuse, did not participate in this study due to an extraordinary amount of clients as well as to avoid cases being counted twice - due to 'co-counselling' with therapists.

Aside from this the high-level of Hamburg is of interest as an example on the following.

Due to the discussion on cults, especially on Scientology, the German parliament has formed a special commission (Enquete-Kommission "Sogenannte 'Sekten' und Psychogruppen) on cults. This commission tried to investigate the findings on RA. They concluded in their final report, that further research on these issues is needed, especially due to what they call 'split data'. They have send a questionnaire to every Landeskriminalamt (which is the police headquarter for the state) and were quite surprised by the replies. It was clear that the police have nearly no data on cases, which is caused by their way of running statistics as well as on the organisation; there is no federal police like the FBI in the states.

Another interesting fact is the quite clear amount of disinformation. Take Hamburg for example: the police reported zero cases, therapists have 47 cases in treatment. The sexual crime unit of the police had reported about 12 cases; as they told me in a personal conversation, none of these cases made their official way the commission. This is not surprising for those working in the field of Ritual abuse.

The German government changed in September and we are still waiting for some consequences on this parliament commissions report.

One last point, which bring me full circle to where I started, is something which has to be considered as good news: In October 1998 the Australian government granted fugitive status and a protection visa to a German Ritual Abuse survivor who had fled fifteen years ago from a cult involved in child pornography and child-trafficking. The Australian Refugee Review Tribunal stated before the final hearing: *"It is accepted [...] thirdly, such groups exist in Germany and the authorities have been largely ineffective in stopping their illegal activities..."* (Quotation from a preliminary paper to the final hearing). The final decision, done by the Australian

government, because there is no existing law for cases like this, stated that this survivor is a refugee in need of protection by the Australian government, *"as the German government is either unwilling or unable to protect victims of ritual abuse."* (quoted from the decision).

The bad news is that there are no NATO-forces, no United Nations, no Amnesty International who will protect these victims and their civil rights. Even worse: Ritual Abuse is not acknowledged by the general public nor by a large number of mental-health professionals and law-enforcement officers. An American therapist entitled an upcoming book on Ritual Abuse "The Hidden Holocaust". In Germany it took fifty years to create a law which makes the denial of Auschwitz and the Concentration camps punishable. Has this to be a lesson for the denial of Ritual Abuse?

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