

The Silent Minority

*A Report concerning Ritual Abuse amongst
Asylum Seekers
in Scotland*

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LOTTERY FUNDED

The Silent Minority

A report into the prevalence of Ritual & Organised Abuse Within the Asylum Seeking & Refugee Communities in Scotland.

1. Introduction, the origins of this report.

This report was initiated after concerns were raised by several organisations at a Glasgow Rape Crisis Training event to members of Tayside Ritual Abuse Support and Help (T.R.A.S.H.) staff in February 2007. These organisations working with Asylum Seekers in Scotland expressed fears that some Asylum Seekers were unable to report ritual abuse cases and subsequently were not being granted asylum in the UK. By “unable” it is meant that they could not physically talk about the abuse that they had suffered for various psychological reasons. This was apparently not being considered during the asylum process. It was feared that these people were being returned to their countries of origin to face further abuse. As a result of these fears T.R.A.S.H. sought funding from Awards for All to commission this report.

2. What is Ritual Abuse?

Tayside Ritual Abuse Support and Help defines ritual abuse as organised sexual, physical and psychological abuse, which is systematic and may be sustained over a long period of time. It may involve the use of rituals, with or without a belief system, and usually involves more than one abuser. Other organisations expand that definition to include ‘spiritual’ abuse, although how this is defined seems to depend on religious orientation. Various ritual abuse support organisations and websites do vary the definition of what constitutes ritual abuse, especially depending on religious, cultural or political bias. However, during the research process it became apparent that the T.R.A.S.H. definition of ritual abuse is the least biased and essentially ‘palatable’ to the objective observer.

3. Issues concerning the definition of ritual and organised abuse.

Ritual and organised abuse are areas of great controversy and exact definitions and categorisations have divided campaigners against abuse since the late 1960’s. The terms ritual and organised abuse can be applied to many reported instances and cases of abuse such as those mentioned below. It is worth mentioning at this stage that the definition of ritual abuse especially is a matter of great debate and controversy. Elements and practices of various religious, institutional, political and cultural authorities have been subjected to accusations of abuse and defined by others or ideologically opposed parties as ritual abuse.

Some more widely accepted examples of abuse with ritualistic elements are:

1. Some Religious extremists believe that individuals can be 'possessed' by "spirits'. They will in some instances perform an 'Exorcism'. This often involves physical and emotional abuse. In some instances, sexual abuse has been alleged. In 1995 it was reported in the American press that two people died during exorcisms and isolated court cases have appeared in various parts of the world including Germany. Note that neither the Vatican, nor any other religious authority has officially sanctioned or authorised an exorcism in over 75 years.
2. Widespread accusations concerning Roman Catholic Priests abusing children have surfaced the world over. Some Priests have been convicted of child abuse. The use of rituals by priests during abuse has been mentioned during trials, although evidence of this being commonplace has not as of yet been found.
3. In America, allegations of ritual abuse have been levelled at religious bodies who withhold needed medical attention from children and/or adults because of their beliefs. Seeking to cure the child through prayer and ritualised practices alone is seen by many as abusive.
4. Some parents seen to follow the "spare the rod, spoil the child" ethos, who use corporal punishment or physical abuse, have faced the accusation of abuse. The use of physical abuse, religious motivation and ritualised punishment has led to widespread debate. However defining this as ritual abuse seems to be a question of religious, political or cultural bias.
5. Some religious rituals involve sexual activity. Normally this is in private between consenting adults. However, in rare instances, children have been involved as either victim, "abuser" or witness. For example, the organisation Population Concerns reported in 2001 that in South Africa, where education about AIDS was recognised by the international community as lacking, people consulted local shamen or witchdoctors for information. Unfortunately the myth arose that having sex with a virgin could cure AIDS. This resulted in the heavily publicised rape and molestation of children as young as nine months old.
6. A few convicted child molesters, it has been claimed, use satanic motifs during abuse. The use of satanic ritual and paraphernalia during abuse was evident through testimony. However the abusers admitted they were not Satanists, but found the ritual useful as a control technique.
7. Reports of 'genuine' satanic ritual abuse (SRA) have surfaced regularly since the 1980's. It is said to involve multigenerational groups of highly organised secret underground sects that indulge in mutilation, cannibalism, sexual abuse and systematic torture. Although some people have been convicted of SRA, it has also been stated by police and other investigative agencies that in over twenty years of investigation no physical evidence of this has ever been found. (1)

4. Ritual abuse in the media, the “Satanic Panic”.

An important issue to be raised by any report attempting to investigate the prevalence of ritual abuse, is how ritual abuse is perceived by the media and, in turn, the general public. It is accepted that organised abuse is a real and pressing issue in today’s society, however reports of ritual abuse are treated with scepticism. This is understandably so considering how cases have developed in the media in the 1980’s and 1990’s.

The McMartin preschool case in America, along with the cases Gerald Amirault and Paul Ingram have raised serious concerns about the way investigations into ritual abuse are handled. In all three cases hefty jail sentences were given after convictions based on testimonies, which have since been proven to be unsound, and in which no physical evidence was found. (2)

In Britain, cases in Cleveland and Orkney left authorities and Social Services facing a barrage of criticism over the handling of events. Services were accused of getting caught up in a “Satanic Panic” and mishandling the investigations, or having a “gung ho” attitude by organising dawn raids to ‘rescue’ victims from their unsuspecting parents. This was aggravated further in 2004 when, on the island of Lewis police and social services were involved in the arrest of several people over allegations of ritual abuse. The case was eventually dropped. (3)

In both Britain and America such instances have been a source of great embarrassment to authorities.

Many government and local authorities along with most other social work based organisations such as crisis centres, women’s organisations and children’s charities are reluctant to discuss or entertain the notion of ritual abuse being a real issue. It appears that to talk about ritual abuse and most people will automatically add the preface ‘Satanic’ and refuse to risk their credibility by talking about it.

There is no doubt that abuse happens and has been perpetrated in some instances by religious people and organised groups, religious or not. There have been more reports than ever relating to the trafficking of women and children within the sex trade by organised criminal gangs. There has also been recent reports of crimes with specific cultural biases such as ‘honour killings’ and female genital mutilation or ‘circumcision’. Some of these crimes have ritualistic elements to them and must be seen as ritual or organised abuse.

5. Organisations in Scotland working with Asylum Seekers.

There are over 100 immigration advice offices in Scotland dealing with immigration and Asylum issues. These are based either in local Citizen Advice offices or, in some instances, within ethnic specific organisations and businesses.

This does not include the Asylum Services supplied by local government such as the Asylum Seekers Response Unit, the National Asylum Support Service and the Border and Immigration Agency. However, the first contact for most Asylum Seekers seems to be the various Housing associations and ethnic community groups based mainly in Glasgow and Edinburgh. For the purpose of this survey 182 organisations, charities and local support services were contacted such as the Refugee Council, local asylum offices and rape crisis centres as well as ethnic community centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

6. On Deportation and Support for Asylum Seekers.

According to current figures there are 4,020 asylum seekers in Scotland whose application to remain in the country has been rejected. Most are legally challenging the refusal. An unspecified number have exhausted the legal process and face imminent repatriation. Over 400 failed asylum seekers are classed as unable to return home. Some are from countries like Zimbabwe, which is the only country officially listed as too dangerous to repatriate to. Other countries such as China refuse to allow asylum seekers to return. According to the Home Office 74% of asylum applications will be rejected.

Once rejected, asylum seekers lose out on certain benefits and support and face destitution although asylum seeking children are 'fully supported'. (4)

7. The Survey and Anonymity.

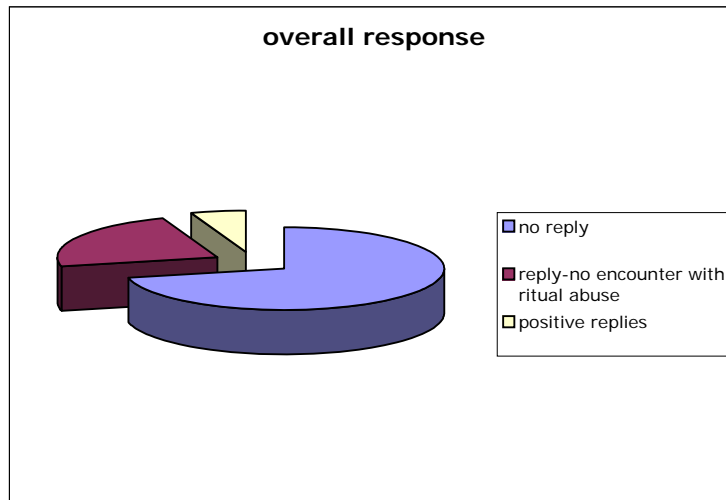
It is accepted that many Asylum Seekers come to the UK to escape violent and dangerous situations. Estimates have been made of the proportion of asylum seekers who have been subjected to torture as being between 5% and 30% depending on the definition of torture and country of origin. Both COSLA and the Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture have said over 6000 people applied for asylum citing torture as its basis. Both organisations state that they believe the numbers to be higher in reality as 'people do not initially admit to their experiences, especially to an immigration officer of the opposite sex'.

(Angela Burnett, senior medical examiner, Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture).

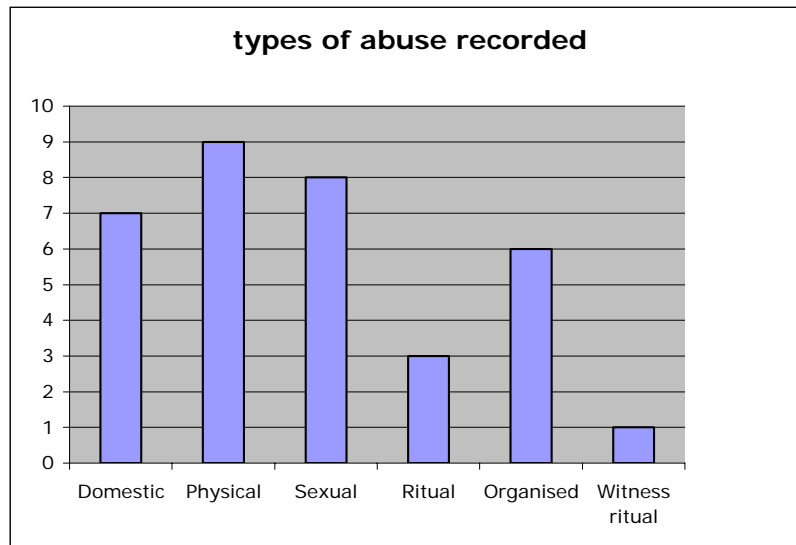
It was decided that due to the controversial nature of the issue of ritual abuse, all surveys would be carried out anonymously to allow all agencies to talk openly without risk of ridicule or accusations of satanic panic. As a result all organisations were asked only to name the region in which they worked on the questionnaire.

8. Results from questions.

Of the 182 agencies and organisations contacted, 52 replied to the survey.

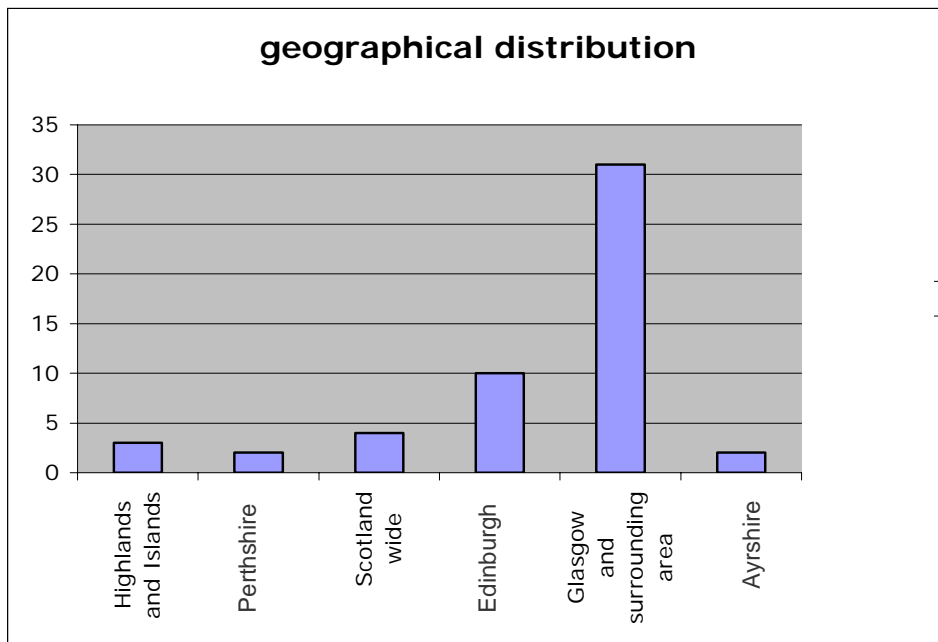


Of those 10 responded positively to the issue of abuse being disclosed by asylum seekers in Scotland. Reports of organised abuse were twice the reports of ritual abuse, with one agency needing to report that witnessing ritual abuse was an issue also.



The majority of these disclosures were made in confidence and not officially reported. However, at least four disclosures were officially reported to authorities, with one being used as part of the persons asylum claim.

All positive surveys came from within Glasgow and Edinburgh. The overall returns for the survey are illustrated below.



9. Comments from surveys.

Most organisations that had reported having dealt with ritual abuse as an issue for asylum seekers, said their clients were generally afraid to discuss or officially report this abuse. Reasons given were overwhelmingly because of fears of reprisals on their families. Fear of rejection from the asylum process was another issue, but was not as common. It is worth noting that three organisations report clients having seemingly ‘unbelievable’ or ‘irrational and delusional’ fear of the consequences for talking.

10. Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that abuse is a serious issue for asylum seekers. Most asylum seekers, by the government's own reports, are here because of violence, persecution and or abuse. Whether this abuse is considered organised, politically or culturally motivated or ritualised, it does happen.

This research shows that a small but significant number are affected by the inability of people to report or cite ritual abuse as a factor of their asylum needs.

This is aggravated by the general disbelief in ritual abuse, or the continued confusion that all ritual abuse is "Satanic" in nature. It was noted during the research process how difficult it is to get agencies to discuss ritual abuse because of the bad press surrounding past cases.

The combination of the abuse survivors' fear of talking and the authorities' fear of the term 'ritual abuse' is having a devastating effect on the lives of those affected.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that there are asylum seekers in Scotland who have been ritually abused or been party in some way to organised abuse whether this be trafficking or force prostitution. It is also fair to say that some of these people are not getting the help and support they so desperately need because they are too afraid to report these types of abuse.

11. Recommendations.

Most agencies and organisations questioned felt that they could benefit from ritual/organised abuse awareness training. It is recommended that some sort of awareness raising program be initiated.

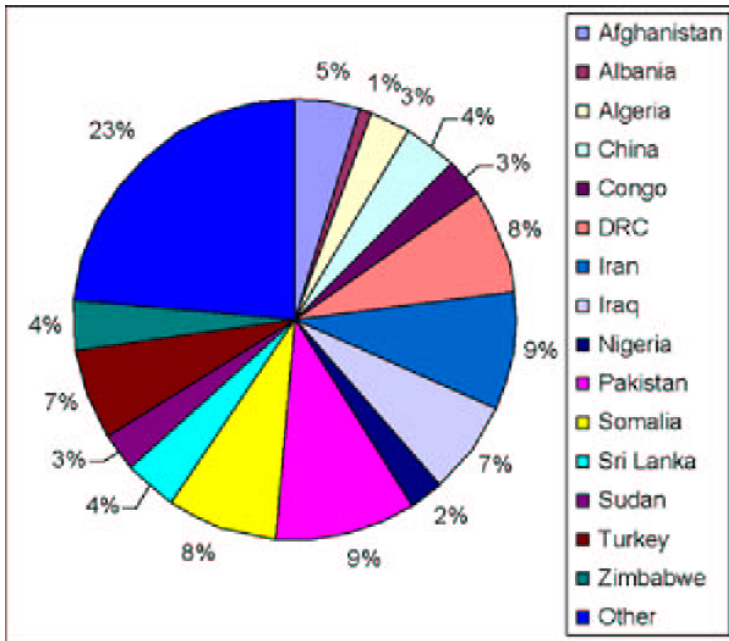
This report barely begins to address some of the more complicated issues surrounding the nature of ritual abuse and the myriad of issues facing asylum seekers. It is recommended that a further, more in depth study is undertaken in order to properly identify areas, agencies and individuals affected by these issues.

It is also recommended that a comprehensive referral system should be put in place. This could prove to be most beneficial when addressing this problem.

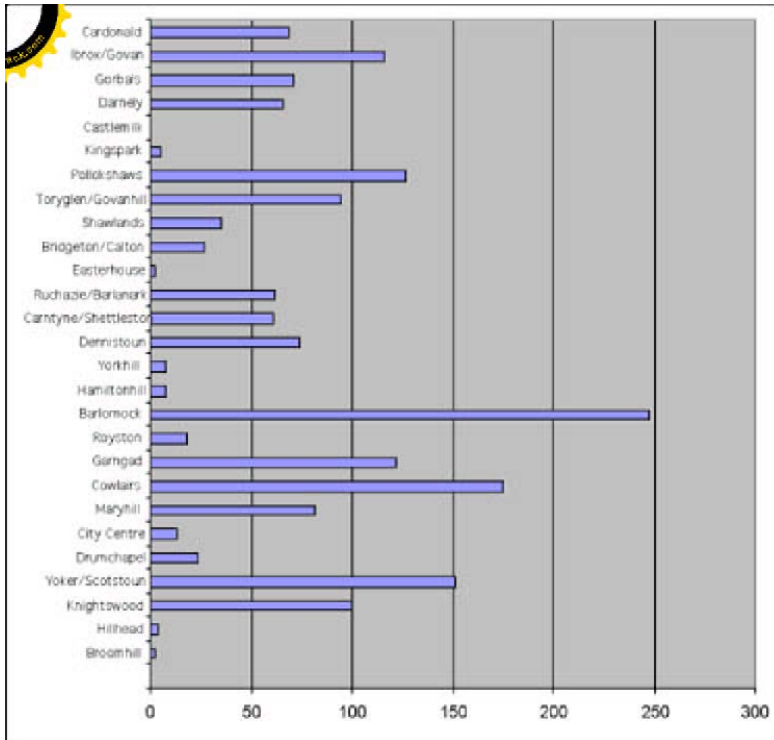
Statistics of Asylum seekers in Scotland

As of August 2006, there were over 5,000 asylum seekers living in eleven different local authorities in Scotland. While Glasgow is currently the only local authority in Scotland that accommodates dispersed asylum seekers, there are 82 asylum seekers living with friends or relatives in ten other local authorities. Over one third of all asylum seekers in Scotland are nationals of just four countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan, and Somalia.

The overall ethnic breakdown is as follows:



Whilst the vast majority of Scotland's Asylum Seekers are living in Glasgow, they comprise less than one percent of the city's overall population. There are over 1500 asylum-seeking children attending school in Glasgow, two thirds of whom attend primary school. Glasgow City Council accommodates 81% of asylum seekers in Glasgow, with the remaining being accommodated by YMCA Glasgow and the Angel Group. Asylum seekers are provided with housing in various different parts of the city, as the graph below demonstrates:



The following statistics provide a summary of the numbers of asylum seekers in Scotland, as of August 2006. There are currently 1770 main applicants (which amounts to 5,003 people)

The Scottish Refugee Council has recently published research on destitution levels among asylum seekers in Glasgow. During February 2006, 103 individuals presented as destitute and were looking for help and support. Twenty-seven of the destitute asylum seekers also had dependents; a total of 51 dependents were recorded, 25 of who were under the age of 18. As such, there was a minimum of 154 destitute asylum seekers and refugees living in Glasgow during February 2006. The largest groups were from Iraq (21.6%), Iran (18.6%) and Somalia (8.8%); the majority of people surveyed were in their twenties (36%). Almost 10% were younger than 20 years old. Only 17% of people surveyed were older than 50.

There is a lack of robust information about the number of refugees living in Scotland. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of refugees in Scotland live in Glasgow, with 'national clusters' organically forming in different parts of the city. Some of these clusters have sufficient mass to attract refugees from other parts of the UK. However, it is also acknowledged that this 'pull' factor is not unique to Glasgow.

(Statistics courtesy COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership.)

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1. Paraphrased or paraphrased and quoted from “Satanic Ritual Abuse: An Introduction,” by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance

www.religioustolerance.org/sra_intro.htm

See also:

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- “Priest Scandal Extends Worldwide; Catholic Heartland of Ireland Reels with Revelations,” by the Feminist Majority Foundation, *Feminist Daily News Wire*, <http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/printnews.asp?id>.
- [Http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/correspondent/transcripts.from](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/correspondent/transcripts.from) “Fr. Fortune Took Life with Overdose of Drink, Drugs,” by Brendan Furlong; <http://archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer>.

2. Paraphrased or paraphrased and quoted from “Satanic Ritual Abuse(SRA),” Robert Todd Carroll.

Paraphrased or paraphrased and quoted from “Geraldo Rivera: Satanic Ritual Abuse and Recovered Memories,” by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, based on broadcasts of the Geraldo Rivera program Nov/Oct. the “Recovered Memories” broadcast of Sept/June and Dec <http://www.religioustolerance.org/geraldo.htm>.

See also:

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- “False Memory,” Robert Todd Carroll, <http://www.skeptdic.com/falsememory.html>.
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- “Swift Must Free Amiraault,” *Lowell Sun* at <http://www.lowellsun.com/default.asp>.
- Paul Ingram’ Ritual Abuse Case in Olympia, WA,” by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. http://www.religioustolerance.org/ra_ingra.htm.

3. Information for Orkney and Lewis references:

- www.religioustolerance.org/ra_lewis2.htm
- www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/newspapers/sunday_times/scotland/article552680.ece
- “Orkney expert slams Lewis 'sex abuse' mistakes” by Neil Mackay, Investigations Editor, Sunday Herald, The,

4. Information from “They think we are nothing” A survey of destitution amongst asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. Mhoraig Green August 2006 Scottish Refugee Council



T.R.A.S.H

Ritual Abuse Survey.

Could you please take a few minutes to complete this survey and return it in the prepaid envelope? Thank you.

1. What type of Organisation are you?

Voluntary

Statutory

Public Body

Other

2. In which region(s) does your organisation work?

(I.e.: Western isles, Perthshire, Tayside etc)

3. Has Abuse of any kind been disclosed in your work with Asylum seekers?

Yes/No_____

3. If Yes what kind? (Please circle)

Domestic

Physical

Sexual

Ritual

Organised

Other (please specify)

4. How has this been brought up?

Reportable Disclosure

In confidence Disclosure

Via Colleague

Part of Asylum Application

Other (please specify) _____

5. Have Asylum Seekers been concerned/afraid about the consequences of talking about their abuse experiences?

Yes/No _____

6. What kinds (if any) of consequences have been mentioned?

(Please circle)

Reprisals on Family

Rejection from System

Irrational/delusional fears

Other

(If other please specify) _____

7. Do you think your organisation could benefit from (Please circle):

Information on Abuse Disclosure

Support on handling Abuse Disclosure

Staff training on Abuse Disclosure