

Inquiry draws no firm conclusion on abuse ring claims

But commissioner does fault slew of government, police officials for not taking complaints about sexual abuse seriously

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After five years of intensive and controversial probing, an inquiry into rampant sexual abuse in Cornwall, Ont. has not reached a firm conclusion about whether or not a pedophile ring was at work in the eastern Ontario city.

Commissioner Normand Glaude's 1600-page report made numerous intricate observations about the credibility of alleged pedophiles and their victims, but declined to answer the central question that led to it being set up by the Ontario government in 2005.

“Throughout this inquiry I have heard evidence that suggested that there were cases of joint abuse, passing of alleged victims, and possibly passive knowledge of abuse,” he wrote.

“I want to be very clear that I am not going to make a pronouncement on whether a ring existed or not.”

However, Commissioner Glaude did fault a slew of government and police officials for not taking complaints of sexual abuse seriously, bunging investigations and allowing pedophiles to either escape detection or simply continue abusing youths.

He also criticized a lack of research and organization that went into the launch of Project Truth – a major Ontario Provincial Police investigation into allegations that a “clan” of pedophiles were operating in Cornwall.

These investigative shortcomings were exacerbated by the actions of a rogue Cornwall Police Officer – Constable Perry Dunlop – whose distrust of the police hierarchy was so extreme that he mounted a one-man crusade to expose sexual abuse in the community, Commissioner Glaude concluded.

He also found that Cornwall Police provided misinformation to the community about sexual abuse investigations, helping fuel an atmosphere of suspicion, rumour and fear.

In one instance, for example, he found that police failed to instigate a proper investigation into pornographic photographs found during a raid of a Cornwall man.

In another incident, staff at the Cornwall Probation Office failed to draw attention to two colleagues who had apparently been abusing youths under their supervision. Commissioner Glaude said that their silence was rooted in feelings of intimidation, office politicking, and an overriding concern that the two men would create administrative trouble by filing labour grievances.

Rivalries and mistrust within the provincial probation office in Cornwall led to information about sexual assaults not being freely exchanged, he said.

“This was a significant problem,” Commissioner Glaude said. “It is my recommendation that training on sexual abuse, particularly male victimization, should be mandatory for all probation officers in the province,” Commissioner Glaude concluded.

In a series of devastating conclusions about the Cornwall Community Police Service, Commissioner Glaude said that officers failed to adequately investigate sex abuse claims that had begun to pile up in the 1980s.

He said that they were also insensitive to complainants, criticizing the force for not keeping victims apprised of the progress of investigations and criminal charges brought against their assailants; for not providing counselling to victims; and for not using all the evidence at their disposal against those who were charged.

He recommended that, in future, the force require officers to properly record their notes during investigations and that they report abuse allegations to child welfare authorities to prevent the victimization of other children and youths.

Judge Glaude said that investigation into the growing number of sex abuse allegations was hampered by a host of problems, including the fact that many officials harboured doubts about sexual assault complainants in past decades; institutional structures were not in place to encourage victims to come forward; documents and records disappeared; many complainants had a difficult history of substance abuse; and the nature of memory often militated against the credibility of complainants.

“Many people – including police officers and jurors – believe that witnesses who are confident, non-evasive and non-hesitant in recounting a past event provide more accurate and reliable testimony,” he said.

“But what they fail to understand is that memory comes in fragments and that hesitation may indicate that a victim is working to reconstruct his or her memories.”

Commissioner Glaude also reached a scathing conclusion about a senior Ontario Provincial Police officer – Det. Inspector Pat Hall – whose actions in one criminal case had a devastating effect on the reputation of a senior Ontario prosecutor, Shelley Hallett.

Commissioner Glaude found that Ms. Hallett did her best to disclose relevant evidence to the defence in the case, yet Det. Insp. Hall misconstrued her actions, unfairly maligned Ms. Hallett's motives, and acted high-handedly by going over her head to provide material to the defence.

The officer's actions were, "unnecessary and unprofessional," Commissioner Glaude said. "It was also irresponsible and, in my view, ultimately contributed to a stay of proceedings in this case."

At a news conference at Queen's Park following the release of the report, Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley and Rick Bartolucci, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, both apologized to the victims of sexual abuse.

"This inquiry report shines a stark light on the damage that can be caused by events of this nature, Mr. Bentley said. "We are truly and deeply sorry - deeply sorry - for the pain and tragedy that has occurred, however it was caused, and we are determined to do whatever we can to support victims and their families."

Mr. Bartolucci said the inquiry was not a waste of money, even though it did not determine exactly what happened after spending \$53-million. He said the inquiry provided a form of closure for those individuals whose lives have been changed forever.

"It would have been our hope that every question that everyone had was answered and that there was complete satisfaction," he said. "But at the end of the day... I'm sure no matter how thorough this report could have been, in some people's eyes there still would have been questions."

Mr. Bentley vowed that victims would receive the support they need, including money, but he declined to be specific.

The inquiry became known as much for its runaway length than for its sensational testimony.

Probing how police and government agencies responded to allegations of ritual abuse spanning decades, the inquiry heard from 175 witnesses over almost five years. Thirty of them were actual complainants who chronicled the abuse they suffered.

Judge Glaude said that the complainants came from all walks of life and shared one common experience. They had been groomed and deceived by pedophiles who assaulted them in hotels, campsites, swimming pool change rooms and store basements.

At their height, rumours of abuse that swept through the Eastern Ontario community included high-profile officials, professionals and clergy taking part in bizarre sexual rituals in secluded venues.

The Ontario Provincial Police investigated the allegations between 1997 and 2001. Their probe – Project Truth – resulted in 114 charges against 15 people, but produced no evidence of an actual pedophile ring. Only one of the accused was ever convicted. Charges against some were stayed. Others charged were acquitted, or committed suicide.

In late 2005, the Ontario government responded to a clamour in Cornwall by setting up the inquiry. It asked Judge Glaude to hold hearings at the same time as it organized workshops and support groups for victims.

However, the seeds of controversy were sown before the inquiry had hired its first staff. Its mandate was seen as being so vague and ill-defined that it was bound to sprawl unmanageably.

Inexperienced in the complex world of public inquiries, Judge Glaude added to the problem by not heeding advice to keep the list of parties with legal standing to a bare minimum. Thirteen parties – some represented by up to four lawyers – were granted standing.

Numerous unforeseen events arose involving publication bans, reluctant witnesses and the wording of the inquiry's mandate. The inquiry had to battle each one in the courts.

Its most notable disappointment was its failure to hear from the very witness who lawyers most yearned to question – former Cornwall police officer Perry Dunlop, whose obsession with uncovering abuse victims had turned a swirl of rumours into a full-fledged civic panic.

Some parties at the inquiry accused Mr. Dunlop of manipulating vulnerable people into concocting lurid stories of ritual sexual abuse.

He was ultimately jailed six months for contempt of court after he quit the force, moved to B.C. and refused to testify at the inquiry, asserting he had lost confidence in the justice system.

Perhaps the most dramatic testimony came when a complainant – who had told police of abusers who wore robes, burned candles and sexually abused young boys – recanted.

Commissioner Glaude noted yesterday that the complainant clearly exaggerated and even falsified many of the events he described – that that he recanted a number of them in testimony before the inquiry.

Within the community, reaction to Judge Glaude's recommendations and findings are expected to polarized and intense.

“This inquiry had a particularly tortuous journey and the commissioner could have received much better guidance from his legal staff,” said University of Ottawa professor Ed Ratushny, author of a recently published book, *The Conduct Of Public Inquiries*. “But

a lot of that will be overlooked if the report rings true, is fair and brings closure to the entire matter.”

With a file from Karen Howlett and The Canadian Press