

NATIONAL POST

Barbara Kay:
Male victims need help too

Posted: January 20, 2010, 10:00 AM by NP Editor

Memo regarding the release of a major report: Don't choose a time when most pundits are so distracted by upcoming holidays that their mental inbox is too full to give the report its due consideration. It will get short shrift — exactly what happened to Justice Normand Glaude's report on the "historical abuse" issues addressed by the Cornwall pedophile inquiry.

On December 15 Cornwall inquiry commissioner Justice Glaude issued a 2,400-page evaluation, deploring the systematic, decades-long failure of the OPP, the provincial government, the Catholic Diocese, the Ontario Correctional Services and other institutions to deal appropriately — when they dealt at all — with sexual abuse of boys and young men by an alleged pedophile ring involving 15 priests, lawyers, doctors and probation officers in the Cornwall, Ont., area.

In terms of follow-on commentary and national discussion of its recommendations, the report sank like a stone in a punchbowl of eggnog.

The Cornwall story began in 1994 with an altar boy's charge that he had been abused by a priest. It broadened into the OPP-led Project Truth, which in turn raised so many questions that it morphed into the \$50-million Cornwall Inquiry, involving four years of hearings, 167 witnesses and 3,640 written exhibits.

In his thoughtful assessment of the scandal's chronology, Justice Glaude called on the province to fulfill 235 recommendations. But a funny thing happened between the published recommendations and the media's reportage of same.

All the mainstream media covered the report's release. But even though all the victims relating to the 114 charges laid in Project Truth were boys and men, and even though in his 75-minute verbal statement Justice Glaude referenced "males" or "men" as those abused seventeen times, almost all references in all media were to "victims," "the vulnerable," "young people," "children" and "youths." The CBC referenced "men" as offenders, the abused only as "victims." Only the Post referenced specifically male pain twice, and the Globe once. This is hard to understand given the report's statements below:

- Institutions faced with allegations "did not understand the serious impact of abuse or about responses typical of boys and young men";
- "Lack of training, particularly in the area of ... abuse of boys and young men, hampered even well-intentioned individuals";
- "Police forces were not well-equipped to provide support to victims of historical sexual abuse, particularly men;"

- “I have concluded that as a society we must recognize the impact of historical abuse and respond more appropriately ... In particular, the needs of male victims must be addressed.”

Particularly negligent, in the light of the dire need for services for boys and men suffering sexual or partner abuse, was the media’s omission of this important nudge: “Men need integrated and coherent plans for services and a way of tracking and measuring implementation and effectiveness of services. Right now there is no integrated plan.”

For Ontario women in distress there are 39 permanently funded shelters and numerous other programs. For Ontario’s male victims of intimate partner violence — straight or gay — there is no dedicated shelter at all, only the precariously funded The Men’s Project in Ottawa offering healing and support programs (there was a Cornwall branch, apparently for show, since the government closed it down as soon as the inquiry finished).

And there is exactly one full-service centre in Canada (meagrely and provisionally, not permanently funded) — the Nanaimo Men’s Resource Centre in B.C. — where a man seeking protection for himself and his children from their abusive mother can find assured refuge.

The hapless situation for Canadian men and boys in flight from abuse is disgracefully scanted by governments and charities. B.C. allocates \$82-million annually for non-medical women’s services, and \$250,000 for men’s. The United Way once issued the Nanaimo Centre a paltry amount of \$1,500 a year, then declined to give anything at all for their “Cadillac program” of \$54 per night lodging in, *faute de mieux*, a modest guest house.

The usual explanation for the disparity is that women need it more. Fine. Maybe they need it more. But exclusively? When mothers are violent towards their children — yes, it really happens! — what should protective fathers do if there is no dedicated refuge to receive them?

If the victims of the Cornwall scandal were all girls and women, imagine the hue and cry to implement recommended improvements to the system. Some day we will look back at our national indifference to the suffering of boys and men with astonishment and shame.

The overwhelming single lesson from Cornwall is that institutional indifference to boys’ and men’s suffering is culturally acceptable. The Glaude report is imperfect but credible. The media must reread it and this time stop reflexively censoring themselves to avoid feminist blowback. It is okay for the media to say that boys and men suffer too, and it is okay to demand that their suffering be addressed with compassion and fairness. The holiday is over. Get on it.

National Post
bkay@videotron.ca