

UPDATE 73

Royal Commission – Ballarat



Monday 25 May 2015 – Day 5

Day 5 of the Royal Commission's hearing in Ballarat heard evidence from Dr Carolyn Quadrio who is Associate Professor with the School of Psychiatry with the University of New South Wales and a consultant child and family and forensic psychiatrist. She specializes in sexual trauma and has been involved in assessing institutional abuse since the 1980s.

She said the issue of clergy sex abuse is a global problem and it occurs in every faith group and that in the late 1990s psychiatry was just as in the dark as the general community on the issue. Even now, she said, psychiatry hasn't fully taken on board the prevalence of sexual abuse and the damage caused.

Dr Quadrio provided insight into the trauma of disclosure and the impact of the often negative reaction to people who disclose abuse. She said a large body of research in the past 20 years has helped raise awareness of child sex abuse and has helped change community attitudes.

She talked about the complex psychology of abuse and the subsequent difficulties supporting and treating abuse victims.

Dr Quadrio said children in care of any kind are open to abuse, noting that in Institutional care 30 per cent of girls and 20 per cent of boys are abused and that when the abuse is systemic, the numbers are much higher.

She said screening and testing are difficult as offenders exhibit no particular profile.

She said if a child shows predatory sexual behaviour it is almost always a sign of having been abused.

She discussed the importance of trauma counselling for victims, provided by well qualified counsellors

She described the shattering and damaging impact of sexual abuse of children on their spirituality and the physical damage that results from abuse, including substance abuse, poverty and unemployment. She also noted that the lifespan of abuse victims is cut short by up to 20 years for a complex range of reasons.

She described common characteristics of grooming, including grooming of the child, the family and the community, so that when the disclosure comes, the immediate reaction is that it couldn't be true.

She said current treatment programs for offenders in NSW are not very effective, noting high rates of recidivism. She said 60-80 per cent of people in prison have had traumatic childhoods, including sex abuse.

Dr Quadrio stressed the importance of listening to children. She said children are symptomatic for a reason and there needed to be better awareness in communities, especially among teachers, psychologists and GPs.

Dr Quadrio said that false reporting of child sexual abuse is unusual because of the trauma associated with making a child sexual abuse disclosure.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.

Full witness statements can be read at:

<http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/royal-commission/case-study-28,-ballarat,-may-2015,/case-study-28-opening-and-witness-statements.aspx>

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