



H.B. 196 Sexual Abuse Amendments

Prepped for: Rep. Ken Ivory; Prepped by: Lacey Johnson | January 24, 2024

"OLRGC is a nonpartisan staff office of the Legislature, and the contents of this document should not be considered in support for or opposition to the legislation."

Purpose

Rep. Ivory requested data on ritual child abuse, however, when corresponding with court or prosecuting agencies, a law enforcement agency, and researching online information, little to no data was found. This report discusses why there may be little to no statistics on ritual child abuse and provides examples of ritual child abuse in Utah and the United States.

Gaps in Utah Ritual Child Abuse Statistics

The number of Utah cases involving ritual child abuse is difficult to determine. Reasons for this may include:

1. **Ritual child abuse is not defined in Utah’s criminal code.** Crimes involving ritual child abuse are likely to be categorized or prosecuted as different crimes. (See Utah ritual child abuse examples)
2. **Not enough factual evidence to prosecute or investigate.** A federal law enforcement agency indicated they will get reports of ritualistic abuse but when investigating there is not enough factual evidence to move forward with the case.

Ritual Child Abuse Examples

Utah

In 2022, Utah County reopened an investigation into ritual child abuse. Since reopening, more than 130 potential victims have come forward. One suspect was arrested and charged with sodomy on a child, rape of a child, aggravated sexual abuse of a child, and lewdness involving a child. It was also reported the suspect would administer religious blessings during therapy sessions where the abuse occurred.^{1, 2}

In 2022, the leader of a polygamist sect was arrested for kidnapping, sex with minors, and providing wives as gifts to male followers saying it was an order from God.³

In 2017, two suspects were charged with sexual abuse, kidnapping, and child bigamy after Utah law enforcement found two girls ages 4 and 7 inside 50-gallon water barrels. The suspects were involved in a religious, doomsday cult.^{4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9}

¹ <https://www.fox13now.com/news/local-news/arrest-made-in-utah-co-ritualistic-sex-abuse-investigation>

² [Utah County Sheriff's Office Media - News Details](https://www.utah.gov/newsroom/2022/12/08/1141508061/polygamous-prophet-leader-had-child-brides-documents-say)

³ <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/08/1141508061/polygamous-prophet-leader-had-child-brides-documents-say>

⁴ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/crime/never-before-seen-footage-shows-young-girls-being-rescued-from-twisted-cult-run-by-their-pedophile-dads/ar-AA1n4t90>

⁵ <https://kutv.com/news/local/cult-leader-samuel-shaffer-sentenced-to-prison>

⁶ <https://people.com/crime/utah-man-in-doomsday-sect-had-plans-to-kill-his-possessed-son-investigators/>

⁷ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/us-news/chilling-moment-police-find-missing-31893138>

⁸ <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/chilling-moment-cops-find-missing-girls-on-doomsday-cult-compound/ar-AA1n1WTM>

⁹ <https://kutv.com/news/local/professor-of-law-speaks-on-knights-of-the-crystal-blade-doomsday-cult>



In 1995, Utah native Rachel Hopkins’ parents signed a confession admitting they abused her during satanic rituals.¹⁰

Other U.S. States

In 2023, an Idaho resident was sentenced to numerous fixed life prison terms without parole for murdering her children and plotting to murder a romantic rival. Prosecutors claimed the suspect was motivated by religious beliefs dealing with “dark energy” and “end times”.^{11, 12}

In 2015, two Texas teens were sentenced to life in prison for a satanic ritual killing of another teen. The victim was sexually assaulted and killed by the suspects who were trying to “sell their souls to the devil”.¹³

Online Methods of Ritual Child Abuse

In 2023, a federal law enforcement agency made a public service announcement about violent online groups that extort minors to produce live streams of self-harm. Two groups listed in the public service announcement have members tied to Satanic campaigns. In one incident, a New York resident was discovered with ties to one of these violent groups. When law enforcement searched their residence, they found items relating to Satanism and indications they were tied to an organization that prosecutors called a worldwide satanist group. While it is not known whether the individuals in these groups are extorting minors for ritualistic ceremonies, these examples indicate the possibility of ritual child abuse happening through online platforms.^{14, 15}

Outlook

Ritual child abuse is not defined in Utah’s code and may be categorized or prosecuted as different crimes. While the examples for Utah and other states are seen as more traditional forms of ritual child abuse, it is possible the ease and accessibility of online extortion will, or is, changing what ritual child abuse looks like. It may also make it easier for the ritual abuse to happen from a stranger and not someone the victim knows.

¹⁰ <https://www.deseret.com/1995/4/25/19172028/ritual-abuse-does-exist-victim-says>

¹¹ <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/31/1191058640/vallow-lori-daybell-sentence-murder-doomsday>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/31/us/lori-vallow-daybell-sentencing/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.click2houston.com/news/2015/06/19/second-teen-found-guilty-in-satanic-killing-of-15-year-old-girl/>

¹⁴ <https://nypost.com/2023/09/28/nyc-mans-gun-arrest-unveils-satanic-pedophile-cult/>

¹⁵ <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2023/12/19/hawaii-news/alleged-leader-of-satanic-cult-arrested-in-hilo/>