LSD TESTS KINGSTON PRISON FOR WOMEN 1960'S

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LSD TESTED ON FEMALE PRISONERS . SCIENTISTS EXPERIMENTED ON INMATES AT KINGSTON'S PRISON FOR WOMEN IN 1960'S

Mike Blanchfield

Twenty-three inmates at Kingston's Prison for Women were given LSD as part of a psychology experiment in the early 1960's, the Citizen has learned. The study involving the powerful hallucinogenic drug was conducted with the full knowledge of the prison's superintendent and federal corrections officials. The subjects included a 17 year old girl who still suffers from periodic flashbacks.

"This use of LSD with inmates in the Prison for Women was a risky undertaking," says a report into the LSD use completed in January by Correctional Services. "We conclude that the administration of LSD by the Prison for Women, particularly when it was administered at the prison rather than the Institute of Psychotherapy, could lead to substantial, debilitating long term negative effects."

The report recommends that all the women involved receive a full apology and a "settlement package" from the federal government. But locating the women who were part of the study may prove difficult. The investigators who wrote the report discovered that many inmate files were either missing or had been destroyed.

"The access to administrative and inmate files has been unsatisfactory. The inability to obtain to obtain relevant administrative files and most inmate files made it impossible to provide a full account of the use of LSD or ECT (electroshock therapy) at the Prison for Women." (report)

Investigators interviewed two of the women and uncovered documents that referred to an additional 21 who were part of the pilot study by a psychologist and psychiatrist. Both women complained of long-term effects that continue to plague them decades after their first exposure to LSD. The report says the women suffer from a recognized psychiatric syndrome called POST HALLUCINOGEN PERCEPTUAL DISORDER.

"It's a very sad indictment of our commitment to human rights and social justice, and a number of principles I think Canadians hold dear," said Kim Pate, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. "We're happy to parade around the globe maintaining this is one of the best countries to live. The reality is: not when you go into the bowels of some of our institutions. You certainly don't see the short fingers of the law creeping in there to protect prisoners."

As the head of Canada's leading female prisoner's rights group, Ms. Pate has researched the history of Kingston's Prison for Women. She has yet to uncover documents that back up the inmates' claims of "weird stuff happening in segregation" that dates back decades. "It's outrageous," Claire Price, the executive director of the Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario, said yesterday when told of the report. "I didn't think things of this sort went on in Canada. You always hear these conspiracy theories about various studies they do on prisoners in the United States."

These experiments at the Prison for Women add another chapter to a dubious era in Canadian medical research history. The study was conducted at the same time as the LSD brainwashing experiments by Dr. Ewen Cameron at the Allen Memorial Institute at McGill University in Montreal in the 1950's and early 1960's. That scandal has cost the federal government at least \$7.7 million because it compensated Dr. Cameron's victims to the tune of \$100,000 each. Dr. Cameron's research was initially funded by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. It was also the subject of a two-part CBC television drama called The Sleep Room, which aired in January. So far no one, including the report's authors, have been able to link the CIA with the experiments that were conducted in Kingston.

Between 1952 and 1962, 500 people were given LSD at Saskatoon's University Hospital, Regina General Hospital and Weyburn Union Hospital. Businessmen, students, artists, inmates and hospital staff volunteered for the research project, which was funded by the federal and provincial governments. The Kingston investigation was sparked when a former inmate, Dorothy Proctor, complained in October 1995 to then solicitor general Herb Gray. Last year, Correctiional Services struck a board of inquiry to investigate the complaint.

The report concluded researchers tried to exercise care in the selection of subjects but that they did not obtain proper consent from Ms. Proctor when they gave her her first dose of LSD in 1961. She was in solitary confinement at the time. That first exposure caused Ms. Proctor to have traumatic hallucinations - what is commonly known as a "bad trip." In an interview, Ms. Proctor said she doesn't expect "a compassionate response from the Canadian public at large," because prison inmates are not generally held in high regard and "I know how complacent Canadians are." "Hopefully the day will come when taxpayers realize it is their money being spent by past mistakes of government," she said. "Maybe then, they'll be more vigilant."

The Commissioner of Corrections, Ole Ingstrup, declined to be interviewed. Department spokesman John Vandoremalen said yesterday he could not answer specific questions about the report. He said the department needed to "study" the findings. Some of the issues to be studied, said Mr. Vandoremalen, would include the issues of compensation and the missing documents. "The issues are rather complicated," he said. He would not say what, if anything, the department is doing to track down the missing study subjects.

In testimony before the board of inquiry last year, Ms. Proctor said she believed

she was targeted by researchers because she was viewed as a "throwaway" who had no family connections beyond prison walls. "I had no friends. If I had died in Kingston Penitentiary, the report would have said I just died," Ms. Proctor testified. "I think I was targeted because I was 16, I was black, and I didn't have anybody on the outside who cared."

The board of inquiry conducted interviews throughout 1997 with Ms. Proctor, retired prison staff and the two men who conducted the study. The two researchers provided investigators with written records of their study. In the early 60's, LSD was legal and was viewed in the psychiatric community as a potential wonder drug that could break down the brain's defences and be an effective therapeutic tool. That promise was never realized. As the report states: "this promise was considered more of a hypothesis than a proven fact." The drug was banned in Canada in 1969. By the end of the decade, the drug had penetrated the flower child subculture.

The complaint was one of two filed by Ms. Proctor with the federal Solicitor General. She also complained the RCMP mistreated her during her tenure as a paid crown agent in the 1970's and 1980's. Her role was to infiltrate the drug underworld on behalf of police. She alleged that the Mounties took advantage of the fact she was a drug addict who came from an abusive background. They plied her with drugs and took advantage of her sexually, she alleged. An investigation has cleared at least one Mountie of any criminal wrongdoing. However, an internal disciplinary probe is still underway.

The Corrections Canada investigation into Ms. Proctor's LSD complaint has concluded. Her complaint was corroborated by one other former inmate and through written records about the experiments uncovered during the investigation. Ms. Proctor said she is pleased with the report's findings, and was well treated by Corrections Canada officials during the course of the investigation. She hopes she will receive a suitable financial settlement that will allow her to go to university. Ms. Proctor kicked her drug habit several years ago.

Ms. Proctor and her lawyer are to meet in March with Corrections Canada officials to discuss a financial settlement. No lawsuit has been filed, however her lawyer, James Newland, said he won't hesitate to take the matter to court if a "substantial" settlement can't be negotiated. "I found the report disturbing," said Mr. Newland. "Put yourself in the place of a 17 year old young woman in solitary confinement. To be in that vulnerable a position and have the last vestiges of your identity swept away with this kind of drug is a scary proposition."

In 1960 Dorothy Proctor was a troubled 17 year old who was sentenced to three years in prison along with three accomplices for her role in an armed robbery and break-in at a private home in southern Ontario. It was Ms. Proctor's first run-in with the adult court system although she had beenin and out of juvenile detention facilities. She was born and grew up in the Maritimes, where she was sexually abused as a child.

Ms. Proctor complained that her exposure to LSD in prison, which she said was her first experience with drugs, was the first step in becoming a drug addict. In the next three decades, she experimented with soft drugs, heroin and cocaine. By the time she was recruited by the RCMP in the early 1970's, she had bottomed out and was living on skid row.

"Arguably, the administration of LSD in prison was a major aspect of her going down a road in life which was not a very happy experience for her," said Mr. Newland. "She's managed to pull herself out of that life. She deserves credit for doing that."

While the LSD experiments were going on at the Prison for Women, a researcher at Queen's University was also studying the drug. Dr. George Laverty, a psychiatrist and professor was studying "perceptual heightening" of subjects while under the influence of LSD. However, as Corrections Canada investigators found, Dr. Laverty's experiments were conducted under much different circumstances than those carried out on inmates across the city. "While Dr. Laverty's work was neither on the use of LSD for treatment purposes, nor carried out in a prison setting, it does speak to other views on what was appropriate at the time," the report states.

The experiments were conducted at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital using volunteers. Emotionally unstable people were screened out because they were known to be prone to adverse effects. The subjects were also supervised until the effects of the drugs wore off; family members or a researcher would remain with the subjects overnight.

In Ms. Proctor's case, she was abandoned inher cell in solitary confinement in the basement of the penitentiary. During her bad trip, the walls melted, the bars of her cell turned into snakes. "I remember dry screaming, screaming but nothing coming out," she testified at the board of inquiry. "No one (was) there to help me ... things all over my body." The report concluded that giving Ms. Proctor LSD while in solitary confinement "fell far short of what was considered suitable in the field at the time" and could be "conducive to negative effects during the session and possibly long term as well."

Another female inmate, whose name was withheld in the report, told investigators about being locked in her cell after she was given her LSD dosage. She slashed her left arm. When it bled she imagined spiders crawling out of the wound. She could not sleep because she hallucinated that "spider semen crawled up my legs and into my vagina and some crawled up my body and entered through both ears. That night I wadded up toilet paper and plugged my vagina, anus and ears. I never slept."

The long term effects on both women were severe.

Ms. Proctor avoids opening cans because she imagines the lid growing large and moving towards her to slice her. She can only sleep if she holds her arms across herself or clasps her hands together. She avoids looking into mirrors to avoid being drawn into them. She also avoids her reflection in store windows or pools of water. She has difficulty with depth perception and walking down stairs. If she looks at her body too long, she imagines her skin starting to bubble and ooze.

The unnamed woman said she continues to hear voices in her head. She can only sleep three hours at a time, and only if she can feel the stability of a wall. She has panic attacks on escalators and elevators. She avoids mirrors for fear of being drawn into them.

"We are struck by the similarity of some of the long-term effects reported by these two subjects of LSD treatment at the Prison for Women," the report states. "We are certain they have had no contact with one another."

The report says the women likely suffer from a condition called POST HALLUCINOGEN PERCEPTUAL DISORDER PHPD which was first recognized in 1958.

It is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the recognized handbook of mental illnesses. The manual says flashbacks are a feature of the disorder, which "causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning ... the perceptual disturbances may include geometric forms, peripheral-field images, flashes of colour, intensified colour, trailing images (images left suspended in the path of a moving object remaining after removal of the object) ..." The flashbacks can be triggered by entering a dark environment, drugs, fatigue, anxiety or other stressors, the manual says.

The Prison for Women remains open despite plans to close it and transfer female inmates to five smaller regional facililties across Canada. As of late last year, it was home to 24 female prisoners.

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