



Mental health, psychological abuse and health regulation

Description

I'm putting this post here to welcome those who are arriving at my site as a result of being quoted and linked in the August 2020 piece on VICE titled ["I lost my wife to a cult"](#), which is, sadly, the story of what happened to my own family.

It's a tragedy, and painful to recount, and something I've tended to be private about with respect to my role as an elected Councillor. I consented to participate in the story because of my desire to raise awareness of an important issue.

I believe most people expect government to have laws against the exploitation of the vulnerable. For myself, I am committed to that fight.

In recent years, Australia has conducted a debate on religious freedoms. We live in an open, pluralist society. It is fundamental to our national character that freedoms of belief, association and expression are respected.

But how do we deal with those who abuse the sense of purpose and hope that many find in faith, and use the cloak of religion to commit objectively evil acts?

It is not a rising tide of secularism that represents the worst threat to mainstream religions — believers that keep to social norms and who do genuinely charitable work in our communities. Rather, it's a minority of "bad apples" that exploit the respected place of religion in our society.

Our laws discern a difference between *belief* and *conduct*. If you commit an assault, or perpetrate a fraud upon another, we accept these as clear breaches of a moral code and the law will bring you to book.

But if you lure someone into a cult, suppress their critical thinking faculties, change their name, poison them against the affections of their family, and rob them of years of their life, then the law, presently, is silent. It is an act equally as violent as a physical assault or a fraud — and indeed, often combines elements of each.

Back in 1998, the Australian Standing Committee of Attorney's General formulated something called the Model Criminal Code. It was aimed at harmonising laws between the Commonwealth, the States and Territories. The Model Code contained a proposal to introduce an offence of *Psychological Abuse*, both to account for cult abuse and some aspects of domestic violence.

Despite the objective merit of the proposal, and my personal advocacy to the then NSW Attorney General in 2012, no Australian State ever saw fit to adopt it into their statutes.

This has been an area of advocacy for me for many years.

Further reading:

My other piece, [Confronting Those Who Prey On The Vulnerable](#).

[Older pieces on my other \(personal\) blog about cults](#).

My presentation to the national conference of the [Australian False Memory Association](#). The first half of the video elaborates on the story appearing in the VICE piece linked at the top. The video from 26m00s on describes my political advocacy in this area.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created

August 20, 2020

Author

councill

default watermark