

New Zealand police apologise to Roast Busters' victims

Elle Hunt Thursday 19 March 2015

Police conduct authority finds 'significant deficiencies' in investigation into young men's Facebook boasts of having sex with drunk and possibly underage girls

Police in New Zealand have apologised to the young women at the centre of a high-profile investigation into alleged sexual offending, after an independent watchdog said "victims were let down" by the police response.

In November 2013 a group of young men calling themselves the "Roast Busters" were reported to have been boasting on Facebook about having sex with girls who were drunk and suggested to be underage.

The group had been active for two years. One of the boys, who were all 17 or 18 and based in Auckland, was revealed to be the son of a police officer and another of a media personality.

Police confirmed that they had received four reports relating to the group from girls aged between 13 and 15 since 2011.

Their perceived inaction and the extent of the alleged offending prompted national outcry and shone the spotlight on sexual violence in New Zealand. A 2001 study found one in five women and one in 20 men said they had experienced it, and an estimated 90% of offences go unreported.

In October police concluded their year-long investigation into seven incidents of alleged sexual offending involving seven victims and five suspects. Thirty-five men, all but two over the age of 17, were assessed as "persons of interest" and 110 women and girls were interviewed, but no charges were laid.

On Thursday the Independent Police Conduct Authority released a report into the police response that found "significant deficiencies" in the investigation.

The IPCA's chairman, Judge David Carruthers, said victims had been let down by officers' failure to investigate connections between cases, and to work with outside agencies to prevent "what was clearly unacceptable and, in some cases, criminal behaviour".

In a number of cases police failed to follow up lines of inquiry and record details correctly, and there was insufficient supervision of the investigation of individual cases, he said.

Carruthers praised officers' treatment of alleged victims and their families but said the officers' interaction with the men who were the subjects of the investigation and their families was "inadequate or non-existent".

"The failure of police to make contact meant the young men's parents were never made aware of several of the incidents and details of their sons' involvement and therefore they were unable to intervene or act to address the behaviour," he said.

Nevertheless, the IPCA did not find evidence of widespread poor practice nationally in the police investigation or prosecution of child abuse or sexual assault cases. .

It recommended an audit of current cases being investigated by the police unit in question to determine whether shortcomings persisted.

The Waitemata police district commander, Superintendent Bill Searle, has apologised to the young women involved, and offered to meet them.

"I accept the IPCA's findings that some of my staff did not meet the required investigation standard ... We

clearly let the victims down. This is regrettable and I reassure the public that we're absolutely committed to making sure this doesn't happen again."

The police commissioner, Mike Bush, said the investigations "fell far short of what I and the New Zealand public rightly expect".

"I am very disappointed that we let down the young women at the centre of the Roast Busters allegations," he said. "The focus of the modern New Zealand police is putting the victims at the heart of what we do and taking a preventive approach to offending. In both these areas we did not perform to the level required and expected." An earlier IPCA report on the police handling of the cases found a "systemic breakdown in communication by police" that led to inaccurate information being provided to the public.

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/19/new-zealand-police-apologise-to-roast-busters-victims?CMP=share_btn_link