

B.C. attorney general says he's more worried about sex assault than polygamy

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VICTORIA (CP) - The possibility of children being sexually exploited or abused in the community of Bountiful is of more concern than the issue of polygamy, B.C. Attorney General Wally Oppal said Monday.

But Oppal also said he is not ignoring the fact polygamy charges may be available to Crown prosecutors for some members in the southeastern B.C. community. "The fundamental issue here is sexual exploitation of children, sexual abuse of children and sexual assaults - if all that is taking place," Oppal told reporters.

"That is more important than anything else. I'm not ignoring the fact there may be polygamy charges available there but it's much more important I think we can all agree, that we prevent any child abuse."

The B.C. Criminal Justice Branch has started a charge assessment review after receiving an RCMP report.

A separate federal Justice Department report says Canada is violating international human rights obligations by allowing polygamy to persist in the community.

Oppal said lawyers in the criminal justice branch continue to examine the hefty RCMP report concerning the polygamist community to determine whether charges will be laid.

The provincial branch began its charge assessment review late last month after getting an RCMP report.

Police spent months investigating alleged misconduct by some residents of the small town.

In the federal report, the author said "polygamy is a violation of international law" and "Canada has an obligation as a matter of international law to take all appropriate steps."

While polygamy is illegal in Canada, the practice has been going on in Bountiful for many decades. The adherents are members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

The breakaway Mormon sect teaches that men must have at least three wives to achieve eternal salvation.

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