

Opus Dei has a Drug Problem – Transcript

“In Opus Dei there has *never* been ill-informed or forced recruitment, or people reduced to servitude.”

-Opus Dei press release, March 26th, 2024

Consider this episode your introduction to the concept of drug abuse in Opus Dei. If you aren't up to speed on the conversation about this organization and the human rights violations it is currently facing, consider subscribing! I have years' worth of information from covering Opus Dei as an independent journalist here at The Deep Dive Project and I think there's something here for everyone. That being said, we really need to talk about this issue because it is SO MUCH worse than I initially thought. Let's not waste any more time on the intro – My name is Rebecca. Welcome to The Deep Dive Project.

This isn't a new phenomenon. For many, many years, people have attempted to raise the alarm concerning the environment inculcated inside the Catholic Personal Prelature of Opus Dei. However, these reports have been treated as unreliable and unworthy of notice the majority of the time, even following recent media coverage. The general “vibe” has been that these cases are random one-off situations barely worthy of notice. Opus Dei swears up and down that any alleged human rights violations are the feature of some bygone era, but it has been unable or unwilling to back those statements up with any kind of transparency or substantive documentation. It is becoming increasingly clear that not only is the organization skating by on the thinnest of semantics, relying on a campaign of suppression and deflection to keep its name clear, but that it is beyond unreliable and trustworthy.

Furthermore, the alleged abuse of psychiatric medicine within Opus Dei has become wide-spread enough to be featured in the 2023 International Ecclesiastical Institutional Complaint Against Opus Dei for Regulatory Fraud, which was submitted to the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in Spain by Antonio Moya Somolinos. I went through the entire document late last year and you can find that episode on my channel if you haven't seen it. But I wanted to come back to it today and read through what it has to say on the subject of alleged drug abuse in Opus Dei. It states,

“The most painful consequences of the abuses present in Opus Dei are, perhaps, the suicides and the people who have abandoned the faith after leaving the institution. However, it is also important to address the abuses in the field of psychiatric medicine, used to break the will of those who dare to express any discrepancy regarding the institutional inconsistencies they have observed. These abuses are abundant and their effect translates into the generation of depressions in members who previously enjoyed good health and psychological balance. Although it could be argued that there have always been people with a certain psychological vulnerability and that this is also manifested in the religious sphere, the high proportion of people under

psychopharmacological treatment in Opus Dei is surprising, especially among numeraries, compared to other Church institutions. In addition, these “methods” have been applied by physicians who are tenured members, some of whom are not specialists in psychiatry. Even more worrying is the fact that these doctors have left blank, signed prescriptions at the centers, allowing in many cases the directors of the center, without being doctors, to prescribe psychotropic drugs, thus violating the most basic principles of medical (and Christian) ethics. Its sole objective is to annul the will of the “dissenter,” turning him into a broken person who, in many cases, has been returned to his parents after having ruined his life.

Moya, et al. take the position that these alleged actions constitute true criminal intent and violate numerous Canon laws. It is stated that “the crime of [the] ILLEGITIMATE DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY” as it is defined in Canon 1,397 and Article 125.2 is evidenced in “the cases of auxiliary numeraries (numerary assistants) or numerary priests incardinated in the prelature...[and] in the case of abuse of power depriving [the individual of liberty] through the use of psychotropic drugs.” Moya, et al. are treating this situation and others like it with real seriousness and I think that as members of the public, we should give the stories former members have shared their due diligence.

In this episode, we are going to look at accounts and testimonies from several different former members of Opus Dei and I guess I won’t bury the lead here – they are all eerily similar and all recount the same type of suppressive behavior. But for legal reasons and for reasons pertaining to journalistic integrity, I have to say that these accounts are anecdotal and alleged. However, while Opus Dei would like everyone to believe that these accusations and testimonies are lies and fabrications, it is important to acknowledge that in 2016, the institution Opus Dei, as well as several individuals representing the institution were found guilty and convicted in *Opus Dei v. Tissier* of multiple criminal breaches of labor law. Opus Dei, the corporate work where the victims had been employed, as well as two of the corporate work’s employees were made to pay several hundreds of euros in fines, to a total of 73,000 euros.

I have already discussed this case in previous episodes, but the reason I am bringing it up again is because the individual who initiated the lawsuit, Catherine Tissier, was also exposed to suppressive and controlling techniques with the use of drugs. Experts called to testify during her trial stated that,

“...the story she tells is quite characteristic of the influence of certain sects on their members with early recruitment and commitment, total adhesion, a shared ideal, the implementation in place of a relational technique with one or more guardians, a technique of guilt and imposed secrecy which leads to sub-depression, even depression and induces greater dependence on the sect on which therapeutic hope is formed.”

“...after several months of normal life and privileged relational support, the disappearance of the personality anomalies demonstrates that the depressive acts were generated by the abusive authority which controlled conscience and kept her in a social precariousness which deprived her of all personal freedom.”

“The vulnerability of Catherine Tissier is sufficiently demonstrated by the two expert reports which describe, at the time of the facts, a manifest psychological vulnerability with a sub depressive or even depressive state inducing dependence on others. It does not matter that the first expert (Note: I think Dr Descout) dates this vulnerability back to a period prior to his entry into the Dosnon school. In addition, the testimonies relied on by the defendants to demonstrate that Catherine Tissier was not able, due to the fragility of her state of health, to work like the others and had to be taken care of also contribute to the demonstration of apparent vulnerability. Finally, the medical certificate issued by Doctor Caumont, who examined her during her return to the parental home [in 2001] and concluded the need for gradual drug withdrawal following a very heavy treatment with neuroleptics [sedatives], leaves no doubt about her vulnerability, which is quite apparent to all those who were in contact with her on a daily basis.”

I have quite a bit of documentation about *Tissier v Opus Dei*, including an unofficial English translation of the French court case and a Q&A document that breaks down the facts and findings of the case linked in the source document below. It is such an important case because it establishes the precedent for holding not just Opus Dei’s corporate works accountable (which it claims to have no interest or connection to), but also the organization as a whole. Opus Dei has always maintained that there is no institutionalized problem and that the negative experiences so many former members have alleged having are random outliers in an otherwise pristine and holy organization.

Because of that attitude, the organization has been able to more or less totally avoid any kind of meaningful accountability – except in *Tissier v Opus Dei*. The case establishes that, at

least in that particular situation, Opus Dei not only exerted undue influence over Catherine's life and will to live, but that individuals representing the organization seemingly didn't bat an eye in referring Catherine to an Opus Dei doctor who prescribed her increasingly heavy doses of tranquilizers. I think that it would be reasonable to deduce that the situation that Catherine endured was not an anomaly but rather an indication of a standard operating procedure that according to a number of former members from different regions around the world, has been utilized to suppress and control not just the truth but also the free will and bodily autonomy of innocent people.

Now, something else that I want to bring up before we get into these stories is an Opus Dei internal document titled the *Vademecum*. From what I understand from reading an OpusLibros post titled "The Psychiatrists of the Work", it includes directives about spiritual practices within Opus Dei, the role of the directors, and how new members should be guided in their formation. It includes instructions on maintaining Opus Dei's spiritual ideals, managing personal growth, and fulfilling the apostolic mission.

At one time, you could download and save it from the OpusLibros site, but it appears to have been removed following the litigation between the founder of OpusLibros and Opus Dei. If you are unaware, OpusLibros published some internal documents on the site, which Opus Dei had traditionally vehemently denied the existence of. Following the publication, Opus Dei sued the site's founder in a Madrid court. Opus Dei won that suit, but in doing so, validated the existence of the internal documents in question.

At any rate, the author used a passage from the *Vademecum* to illustrate his allegation, which is that a psychiatrist operating within Opus Dei is a whistleblower, something the *Vademecum* seems to encourage. The quote that he cites states that, "in these cases of depression and exhaustion, one should consult an experienced and prudent doctor – better if they are a member of the Work...it is very important to inform the Directors, in order to provide effective help to those who need it." This quote leaves the impression of an institution with a vested interest in inserting itself between a patient and their doctor and into the decisions that are made concerning the health of that patient. This is so many different levels of wrong.

Now, since OpusLibros published this back in 2004, it's possible that the *Vademecum* has been revised and that attitude is no longer in practice. I find that pretty hard to believe though, for three reasons. The first is that I have heard first-hand statements from former members who hold that the organization is incapable of changing, does not want to change, and believes itself perfect in every way as a divinely inspired institution. The second reason is because of an excerpt from the *Vademecum* which states that, "everything written [in the *Vademecum*] is, in both substance and form, not only good and noble but holy...in all these notes, the exclusively supernatural nature of this work is reflected...the spirit willed by God for Opus Dei." That statement paints the organization into a corner where it is unable to acknowledge wrongdoing without invalidating this and every other statement citing Opus Dei's divine origins.

The third and final reason is because of revelations shared in the June 26th, 2023 International Ecclesiastical Institutional Complaint that I referenced earlier, which states, among other things that “although Opus Dei denies it, any legal solution that is given to them...the leadership of Opus Dei will [take] as something to “cede without conceding with the intention of recovering”...they will wait (they openly say so) for this Pope or the next ones to pass in order to “recover” what Saint Josemaria wrote.” This attitude stems from apparent dissatisfaction within Opus Dei’s internal government with the sanctions and restrictions that have been imposed on the organization which they feel force the Opus Dei out of alignment with Josemaria Escriva’s intentions. But at any rate, I mention all of this, the statements from the 2016 Tissier case and the 2023 International Complaint, as well as the Vademecum in order to create a general impression of exactly what we are dealing with here. Let’s get into this thing a bit more and hear from those who allege first-hand experience of psychopharmacological drug abuse in Opus Dei.

No Valio la Pena:

This first account was published in a series of articles on OpusLibros by a user with the handle “No Valio la Pena”. Since he doesn’t reveal his name, I will be referring to him as “Valio”. His story also lives as a document with the title, “Autobiography of a Numerary: Men’s Branch, 2010.” That version contains more detail than the individual articles, but I have linked both in my source document. His entire story is 36 pages long, if you were to download the .pdf. He begins by writing, “I finally decided to write my story. It is recent and if I have not done it before it has been out of fear.” He adds that he chose to omit names because he’s not interested in fomenting a witch hunt. He wrote, “I am not the one to judge people who have hurt me. I forgive you and wish you the best, but since I don’t want others to go through the same thing as me, I have decided to write it.” In the first chapter of his account, he reveals that he attended an Opus Dei school, attended Opus Dei clubs, and had several family members who were or are currently still in the organization. And get this, he writes, “Before I was 14 years old, my club preceptor (a numerary) already raised my vocation as a numerary. And I say; can decisions be made for life at that age? I leave it to your judgement. After two conversations with that numerary (for more than an hour!) about why he was convinced that I had a vocation as a numerary, I went to pray and said; yes, I have a vocation...I remember that I was not even 14 years old, so I had to wait seven months before I could write the letter asking to be an aspiring numerary” (referred to now as a ‘junior candidate’).

Does this not contribute to the general perception that this organization is targeting children? Valio was not even 14 years old when an adult began to apply pressure (hours’ worth, according to his account) to convince him of his “vocation” to Opus Dei. And isn’t it interesting that no one ever realizes that they have a vocation to this organization on their own? It is always “revealed” to them by someone who is already in the organization? Isn’t that weird? So, by the time Valio was 19 years old, he had been appointed to a position within the study center that he had moved into after graduating from high school, as well as to a position as the director of an Opus Dei house of formation. He writes, “I was only 19 years old, but I was a 100% Opus

person, 100% faithful to what the Work needed...there was no time for MY things...and I was delighted, for the record, I had been trained for that and that is what I did.” And so, as a malleable and dedicated fanatic of the Work, he became the ultimate “yes man” that the organization demanded he be. And like he said, he was HAPPY to do it. It was, after all, his vocation. During the ensuing years, he was shuffled from city to city, from internal position to internal position, sometimes straddling multiple positions at once. And he discusses the way Opus Dei moves the goalposts and manipulates members like him. For example, he wrote, “They ask you to be prepared to say “yes” when they need you as a priest, but at the same time you have to be prepared if they never call you because they don’t need you as a priest or simply because they think you aren’t useful for it...They will tell you that it doesn’t matter, because the vocation is the same and so on and so forth. But in reality what they do is simply what is best for them.”

Whatever Opus Dei asked of him, Opus Dei got. This included learning new languages, integrating into wildly different cultures, and uprooting his entire life to move to new countries on different continents. And all of this happened within the span of only a few years, between 2003 through 2010, when Valio ultimately exited the organization. Let that sink in. Have you ever tried to become fully fluent in a new language in a year or two – or less? Even if you have an aptitude for it, that’s still a very tall order. And Valio did it. At one point, he writes that to give perspective of how rigorous and difficult these studies were during a particular course that he took, 20 people enrolled and only three people actually completed the course. He also mentions that in addition to spending almost 20 years in Opus Dei, with more than 10 years spent in various internal positions, he also had a biennium in philosophy, a quadrennium in theology, a nearly completed bachelor’s degree in moral theology, plus two years in the Roman college and four years in Villa Tevere. This guy isn’t a slouch or some sort of mindless drone. Opus Dei doesn’t recruit those types of people (not for internal governmental positions, anyway). It seems like they want a very specific kind of person – an idealist with a solid work ethic and the desire to serve. They want free thinkers who aren’t TOO independent. And they take people like that, force them to conform to the Opus way, and do everything possible to stifle and suppress the free will and conscience of the individual. I mean, that’s just my opinion and interpretation of these situations. And it seems like that’s exactly what happened to J.

What happened to him isn’t so different from what others have reported. He was placed into a position referred to as the defender of the regional commission, which is the highest position in the internal government of the men in that region. This meant that he as required to meet with the regional vicar daily to read the reports, notices, and consultations that arrive at and leave the commission. He describes how being exposed to these internal documents and the organization’s decision-making process ultimately created a crisis of conscience. He wrote that,

“it is difficult to summarize in a few words how and why a crisis can come and how mine came...I did not leave because I had a vocation doubt or crisis, in the sense of not being clear if that was the path that God wanted for me. My crisis was not personal, it was not

my own, it was institutional: I was willing to give my life to God...but could I really still think that God was there? As time went by, the things that I did not like and that my conscience said were wrong, were more and more...I saw them in my house and also in the other centers, I heard them when people spoke to me or consulted me. But I denied them, I was convinced that the Work was perfect and that is why I repeated to myself...The problem is yours, you must be wrong because the Work is of God and therefore perfect and your brother directors of Rome know all the regions well...I was like that or several months. But things were getting worse and after a period of “humility”, of continuing to silence my conscience and, deep down, deceiving myself, I decided that I could not continue denying the obvious.” b

So, Valio wrote a letter to the prelate. He gave it to his regional vicar and was open about why he wrote it. But all he received from Rome were crickets. So, he wrote a second letter. He gave it to his regional director again and they spoke at length about it, but rather than receiving any type of validation for his concerns or recognition of the issues he was raising, all his regional vicar had to say was, “What you can’t say is that we don’t strive to do our best.” After that letter was faxed to Rome, he was summoned there the next day. Despite a polite acknowledgement from his regional vicar, no substantive dialogue or acknowledgement of his concerns was forthcoming. Instead, Valio was abruptly summoned to Rome under the impression that decisions about his future would be made without his input, which served to only deepen his disillusionment with the organization’s decision-making process and commitment to transparency and personal respect. The lack of transparency and respect contributed to the inner turmoil that Valio experienced, sending him on a rollercoaster of conflicting emotions – sometimes questioning his decision to write the letter and other times reaffirming his commitment to see the issues he had brought up to some type of conclusion. Prior to departing from Rome, Valio learned that an Opus Dei priest that he had known well for many years at that point had been sent to his region on a surprise visit to “cheer up” the atmosphere, making it clear that the visit was intended to simultaneously bolster morale and downplay any negative feedback. It was, in essence, intended to suppress any concerns, creating a “nothing to see here” atmosphere. Valio arrived in Rome to Villa Tevere on a wave of anticipation and relief, expecting answers and some type of validation of his concerns.

And initially, it seemed as if that was what he would get. His reception at Villa Tevere was warm and accommodating and he was treated with special attention and encouraged to enjoy himself and his stay. However, Valio soon noticed a lack of genuine interest in discussing the issues he had raised, to the point that when he directly inquired about them, he was told that the topics would not be addressed, the implication apparently being that the issues would be too challenging and inconvenient for the directors. Instead of giving his concerns due attention, Valio was instead referred to an Opus Dei doctor-priest for medical review, which Valio felt was a diversion from addressing his concerns. Valio doesn’t identify this man by name, but he was immediately labeled as “obsessive,” asked leading questions about his well-being and mental

state, and was prescribed a cocktail of several different drugs intended to help him “distance” himself from his problems and stress. Valio was told to start taking the medication immediately and to not pay too much attention to the medical inserts intended to provide patients with informed consent. Valio’s compliance was expected and contributed to Opus Dei’s strategy of managing perceptions and maintaining control.

This strategy had several different facets, which Valio described as a minimization of the issues he had raised with an emphasis that any problems were personal rather than related to Opus Dei, a shifting of focus to Valio himself in which he was made to believe that he was the problem and that he needed to change, rest, and distance himself from his concerns, exaggerated care and kindness intended to create a sense of belonging so that he would not question or assess his situation critically (essentially love-bombing), and manipulative conversations intended to manipulate Valio’s thoughts and feelings, including any doubts about his supposed “vocation” and the implication that he would be nothing without Opus Dei. Valio was expected to conform to the organization’s expectations, suppressing his doubts and concerns. In conversations with Escriva himself, Valio was told that he should have patience and adapt to different cultural contexts, further contributing to the atmosphere of suppression and minimization of his concerns.

During and following his stay at Villa Tevere, Valio began to experience dizziness and fatigue. On the plane ride back to his center, Valio had a moment of profound clarity in which he realized that he had been deceived, ignored, and suppressed. His feelings of betrayal deepened. He wrote,

“once again alone with God, I could not deny something that would be evident to anyone’s eyes: they have not let you speak, you have not discussed the issues that concerned you and also they have told you that you are obsessed and they have even medicated you for that. Why can’t you talk about those issues? Didn’t they appoint you [to be the delegate]? So if they gave you that position, why don’t they even listen to what you ask? Isn’t it your family? Isn’t obedience in the Work supposed to be “intelligent”? You are not refusing to obey what they answer you. The problem is that they don’t even answer you. On the other hand... are you really sick? Do you really need medication? Ok, very well, you are tired and sometimes you have not slept well, but it is normal: who could go to sleep easily knowing that he is giving his life for something that is not what he thought> Losing sleep over important things is not only normal, but it shows that you really love. But does that mean you are sick? Of course not. You have a very normal life. You have many friends, you do sports two days a week, you go out, meet people, study, work, fulfill your plan of life without any problem... you’re fine!

Valio’s decision to leave was made, but it took time to fully cut the cord. He spoke to people that he trusted, family and friends who could provide impartial perspective and support. Lastly, he spoke with a priest who was not in Opus Dei but whom Valio trusted. He said,

“I told him a little about what had happened and my trip to Rome and asked him what he thought. He told me that in all the institutions of the Church there are problems, that it is

normal for there to be misunderstandings, that sometimes, things are done badly but not with bad intentions, that you always have to forgive. I said: yes, I know that and I would have said the same as you, but the problem is that I have not explained myself very well, let me tell you better what I mean. And after talking for a long time, I told him"...that's why I've come to talk to you, because despite the fact that in the Work it is a bad spirit to address a priest who is not from the Work (his eyes are wide open... 'Is it in a bad spirit? Why can't you talk about interior life with a Catholic priest who is not from the work? I'm also a Catholic priest'... he told me) I need your advice. What do you think?" I received the following answer:

1. Never take those pills again. Those pills, what are they for?" "I don't know," I replied, "they told me not to pay much attention to the label." He replied: "Read it, but don't take them anymore. Did you take them today?" "Yes," I said. "No wonder you felt strange," he answered. "Don't take them anymore. You are healthy."
2. "Leave."
3. "Don't lose the faith."

"Yes," I told him, "if I go, it is precisely because if I am still there either I will really go crazy (I spend my life denying what is evident and I have to seriously medicate to be able to bear such a lie) or I lose the faith (after what has happened to me ... am I going to be able to continue thinking that God is in the Church or in any human institution?)" I thanked him for his advice and asked him to pray for me. He told me that God would help me. I said yes, I know, but I have to start a life totally from scratch. I do not have a visa to be in this country (my visa depended on them), I do not have a job, I have almost no professional experience (part-time Spanish teacher for just over a year), I do not have a home or a place to stay, I have no money, almost all my friends are related to the Work ... "Why do you say you have no money? After all those years there, they are going to help you, right?" "No," I said, "when you leave, you leave with nothing. Everything you earned is no longer yours and if you worked for them, no matter for how many years, you don't get anything either." And he said: "How is that possible? In my congregation, if a priest leaves for any reason, he is assigned a salary, he is given an amount every month. It is normal, it is a way of thanking them for their work for so many years." "Forget it," I said, "things are not like that there."

Then, upon returning home, he took the time to actually read his medications' inserts. Valio was shocked to learn that they were intended for conditions that he did not have, such as depression, OCD, bulimia, and epilepsy. Improperly prescribing psychotropic drugs is dangerous and could kill a person. This glaring and unethical situation, coupled with the lack of genuine concern for his and other members' well-being and Opus Dei's prioritization of its own interests over the happiness and wellbeing of members lives were the final lynchpins in Valio's decision to leave. Valio departed his center during the dark of night. He wrote, "I managed to load all my bags in

the taxi that was waiting for me and I left. I remember the thrill of closing the center door after leaving the keys on the steering table and giving a sigh saying, it's finally over.”

Eileen Johnson

Eileen Johnson is another former member who has written and spoken extensively about her time in and experiences with Opus Dei. Eileen was a member of Opus Dei for eleven years. She was groomed by her French teacher and “whistled” when she was 16 years old. Eileen has pushed back repeatedly on the idea that Opus Dei does not exert undue control or influence over peoples’ lives. She has stated that,

“It has been said by defendants of Opus Dei that those who join do so willingly, and have no right to criticize the organization after they leave. Such a judgement overlooks the fact that people, especially young impressionable people, do not join cults. They are recruited, often after being groomed. That process can erode their ability to make informed decisions of their own or use their free will. The targeted individuals, usually teenagers, are normally intelligent and gifted, and good leaders. They are made to feel cared for and special. They develop a great sense of belonging to a spiritual family that claims to be destined to transform society by winning people over to the teachings of founder, Josemaria Escriva.”

During three of those eleven years, she worked as an assistant directress at a student center. Due to her position, she was able to access information and documentation that the “average” member or public do not see. This included the fact that Opus Dei chose to respond to members’ struggles by instructing them to go to an Opus Dei psychiatrist, fomenting active distrust of the individual’s experiences through gas lighting and shifting the blame from the institution onto the individual. Not only did Eileen witness this happen to others, but it happened to her as well, to such a degree that she questioned her own lived reality and grasp on sanity.

In an article titled “Dead or Alive? An Opus Dei Survivor Speaks,” published on OpusLibros, Eileen discusses how even 50 years on from her experiences, she still struggles to put those experiences into words, partly out of a desire not to cause harm or distress to the good people that she knew while she was on the inside. But she feels it is her duty to speak up and share the truth. She says, “Life in the Work suits many; but many others, having been recruited too early in their lives, have suffered to varying degrees over time as a result. This was true in my case and in that of too many others. The outcome was deeply damaging for me.”

Her personal experiences with those representing authority in Opus Dei were, to be quite frank, harrowing and disturbing. She wrote,

“At sixteen, I was a bright and happy student, an all-rounder who loved singing, dancing, and life in general. I wanted to become a language teacher and it seemed I was poised to move on to a successful adulthood. I had met my first love. This was one of the happiest times of my life. But I was unaware that I was being watched by an Opus Dei numerary,

one of my school teachers, who proceeded to groom me through her friendship. I had never heard of Opus Dei and did not know she was a member. After I left Opus Dei twelve years later, I was a shadow of my former self. I became suicidal and my doctor said that the only cases he had seen of this level of distress were former prisoners of war. Why? Well, for one thing I had been on medication prescribed by Opus Dei numeraries (doctors and psychiatrists) for four years before I was able to leave. I was one of many treated in such a way. This was unethical; had I been able to consult an objective doctor I may well have left four years sooner than I did. Independent diagnosis after I left concluded that my problems arose due to the regime I had been subjected to and the cocktail of drugs prescribed.

Our “GP”, Hyacinth Hickey, who on her arrival in the UK from Ireland in the 60’s was put in charge of the health of all of us numeraries and assistant numeraries, had prescribed a variety of drugs to several of us. In my case, she tried me on Librium, Tofranil, Mogadon and Lithium, before settling on Valium. When I was sent to Pamplona for a year to study journalism at Opus Dei’s University of Navarre, the treatment was handed over to my “spiritual directress”, a Spanish woman doctor who continued to prescribe valium to me and medication to another English numerary who accompanied me. I have heard of numbers of former assistant numeraries and numeraries who were drugged in-house by fellow members of Opus Dei, in The UK, Spain, North and South America. Many, like myself, were referred to Opus Dei psychiatrists. This was totally unethical, involving clear conflicts of interest. It happened to Teena Fogarty, former Irish Assistant Numerary, also at the hands of Hyacinth Hickey in the UK. Teena was put on Amitriptyline over a period of seven years. Physical symptoms requiring specialist advice were overlooked, and she was not examined physically. Rather, she was told by Hickey that her physical pain was related to her depression.

When I was eventually able to consult a doctor in the outside world, after leaving Opus Dei, he said that the only comparable case in his experience was that of a former prisoner of war. I have heard similar reports from other former members, particularly those who spent many years in Opus Dei, and/or were of a sensitive disposition. A major criticism of Opus Dei in my experience is that we were recruited with scant regard for our individuality, or for our wellbeing or personal development. We were, quite simply, used. The recruitment and treatment of the Assistant Numeraries was a particularly obvious and stark example of this. Yet the systematic exploitation, coercion and brainwashing of numeraries, especially in the Women’s Section, was also appalling. For me, the worst thing was the use of “friendship” as a tool for proselytism. As someone who values friendship greatly, to be without friends over many years was a form of social starvation, so that when I left I felt dangerously alone in the world.

My doctor, very concerned about the degree of my isolation as I approached my 30th birthday, suggested that I contact Opus Dei to see if one or other of my former

“sisters” might come to see me. My mother phoned and spoke to a numerary who had formerly been a close friend of her and our family. She agreed to come, and arrived the following day for a brief visit. The next day, she phoned to say she had been instructed not to contact me again. She said she was phoning from a coin box in the street, to avoid being overheard. That lady was genuinely fond of me, of my mother and my family, particularly my young nephews. She was the same age as me, had joined Opus Dei at the age of 14, and was popping Valium with alarming frequency. Soon after this, I took an overdose. I remember facing the probability of death, but the prospect of going on existing in such despair, isolation and rejection was too bleak. After I came round in hospital my doctor took me off the valium I had become dependent on. A week later he commented “Ah, now I see the real Eileen! Your eyes have come alive!”

Opus Dei generates a great amount of fear. It is said that fear is mentioned more often in the Bible than any other word. Fear is a limiting and negative human emotion. According to Christian scripture, perfect love casts out fear. There should be no problem about speaking out one’s opinion, offering constructive criticism. In fact, such criticism is a responsible, helpful attitude, though difficult to express and often not well accepted. In Opus Dei, to criticize the perfect Work of God was deemed to be down to pride. The day I left I spoke to the Prelate of Opus Dei in Britain in the confessional. I told him that I thought my depressive illness had been wrongly handled (by members of Opus Dei prescribing me drugs and Opus Dei psychiatrists becoming involved, and my spiritual directors going along with the process. Again, he said I was proud to criticize the Work. With hindsight, I see I was right! In fact, I knew at the time that I was right, though I was too broken to state my case. It took me some twenty years to be able to speak out. First, I needed to recover and live as normal a life as possible. There is something wrong when so many individuals need to remain anonymous and are afraid to speak out. Not that I am saying that wounded former members should speak out; the big priority is recovery, and to make available whatever caring support each one may need. However, Opus Dei generates a great deal of fear. The Prelature should be obliged to acknowledge serious damage done to many people, so often as a result of irresponsible proselytism that fails to consider the good of the individual. Their tactics are systematic, described by Josemaria Escriva in *The Way* and in many internal documents and in his various talks to members.

Eileen’s experiences were eerily similar to Valio’s. Both individuals were true believers in Opus Dei’s mission, both rose to positions of authority within the organization’s administration. And for both of them, the reality that they were forced to contend with ultimately became the factor which destroyed their faith and exposed the true nature of the organization they had devoted years of their life to. And for Opus Dei’s part, rather than addressing the real concerns that Eileen and Valio brought to their attention, they chose to attempt to suppress and control the situation using drugs.

Following the 2021 AP story about the 43 former Opus Dei domestic workers alleging human rights violations and labor trafficking, BBC New Mundo published a story on August 2nd, 2022 with the headline, ““They told us that God asked us to serve”: the 43 former domestic employees in South America who denounce Opus Dei before the Vatican for servitude and exploitation.” One of those 43 whistleblowers is Alicia Torancio who spent a total of 16 years in Opus Dei after being recruited in 1994 at the age of 16. But the final six years were the most harrowing. She recounted the environment and expectations that she was exposed to while working as an assistant numerary. Here are some of her quotes directly from that article:

“They tell you that you offer your work to God. I was concerned that I would no longer be able to send money to my parents. They said, ‘You no longer have to worry about your parents. Now your family is Opus Dei.’”

But what a family! She said,

“They cut off ties with your family and with the (world) outside, but you are also prohibited from making friends with any of your colleagues... They watch you all the time and immediately get your attention.”

“They infantilized you all the time. You had to ask permission for the dumbest things and you had no money to handle yourself.”

At 22, Alicia was appointed head of the kitchen at Laya, the largest assistant numerary residence in the country, located in the prestigious neighborhood of Recoleta, in Buenos Aires. This meant that she was responsible for the menu, shopping, and service for the 100 Opus Dei men who lived there. The pressure was profound and the weight of the responsibility was crushing. The article notes that,

“In Opus Dei there is a manual for everything. And any questioning of what is lived is addressed as a vocational doubt that has a standardized answer: “Any vocational doubt was addressed by the institution as a psychological / psychiatric problem with the consequent supply of psychotropic drugs to neutralize the will,” the complaint of the 43 women say in the complaint to the Vatican.”

Thus, it’s not really surprising that Opus Dei chose to treat Alicia’s stress and overload the same way it treated Eileen and Valio. The article goes on to say that,

“Psychiatrists and psychologists are always members of Opus Dei. Alicia was first taken to a psychiatrist who told her that she had nothing and was pretending to have depression. “What they always tell you is that if Jesus and the great saints endured so much pain, how can you not bear it?” Alicia was taken to another psychiatrist who decided to treat her. “They gave me pills right away, but it was always something that took effect at first but then wore off. I had to take seven to eight pills a day. Or more. I was a zombie and weighed 45 kilos (about 99 lbs.) because I couldn’t eat. I fell into a well and started

having suicidal ideas.” Alicia spent six years like this. “I couldn’t get up. I was in such bad shape that they asked my family for permission to treat me with electroshock. Luckily, they said no. After an overdose of pills, she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and only then did her administration give her permission to go home with her family.”

Alicia left Opus Dei at nearly 30 years of age with just a suitcase and a small bag of personal items. In all her 13 years in Opus Dei, Alicia says she never made money for even one of the hours worked. “They didn’t tell us we were working. They told us that we were sanctifying ourselves, that what God asked us to do was serve and that we were thus helping to transform the world.” Alicia still bears the scars from the spiked chain members are instructed to wear strapped around the upper thigh. This article is linked in my source document if you’re interested in reading it in its entirety. It is a very good article that touches on a number of the concerning aspects of the organization, specifically in regard to labor law violations and human rights issues.

Another former member shared their experience with Opus Dei’s suppression techniques on the Opus Dei Awareness Network in an article titled “Deception and Drugs in Opus Dei.” Maria is a former numerary from Venezuela who was recruited by a numerary she met while studying at University. Her experiences mirror the experiences other former members have recounted. Although Maria was initially happy with her new “vocation,” doubts began to set in rapidly upon moving into the center. She wrote,

“At first, I was happy as a numerary, but I soon noticed troubling inconsistencies. I found the way we recruited new members manipulative and deceptive. A significant incident was when I invited my friend Carolina to a conference in Rome, believing she had a vocation to become a numerary. However, when she was admitted as a numerary, I was told to sever our personal friendship, which I found disturbing. Carolina was later denied numerary status due to her asthma and was admitted as a supernumerary instead. She was devastated by this news and when I listened to her disappointment, I was reprimanded for disobeying the directors.”

She goes on to describe the way her directors handled her struggles. Any doubts that she expressed in regard to her “vocation” were treated as temptations from the devil.

“I felt like I was living a lie, but was afraid to leave because I didn’t want to be doomed to hell. They also told me that if I said “NO” to my vocation I would never be happy or be able to live in the grace of God again. There was a point in my life when I prayed to the founder more than I did to God, almost like if the founder was becoming more important to me than God himself.”

Five years in, Maria’s “chatter” informed her that she no longer had a vocation. When she asked to leave, she was told that she was expected to stay in the center for another month. Maria refused and requested to call her family to come and get her, but that request was denied. When

she attempted to leave the center, she hid the keys and locked the door. She states, “They even had me take Rohypnol, a very strong antidepressant that makes you very sleepy, saying that it would help me get some rest. I took it not knowing how strong that medicine really was and the fact that it made you so sedated that you couldn’t even think straight.” When she continued to be non-compliant, she was finally permitted to leave. However, she left under duress. Maria was informed that she had never done the work’s apostolate but rather her own, and that if she ever spoke out against Opus Dei, her reputation would be ruined. It took 11 years for Maria to gain the perspective and healing necessary to begin sharing her experiences. She closes out her letter with the statement that, “I was so blind when I was numerary. Everything is so clear now. There is no doubt in my heart that Opus Dei acts like a sect within the Catholic church.”

Stories from Reddit

Four months ago, an anonymous member of the OpusDeiExposed community shared a post discussing Eileen’s post about her time in Opus Dei (which we read just a moment ago). In the body of their post they stated that, “Eileen mentions the practice of medically-qualified Opus Dei members prescribing psychiatric medication to her and other members, even long term. This is something I experienced more recently than Eileen and is common to many testimonies of former members.” Let that sink in. Anecdotal, yes. It’s alleged, yes. But just take it in, along with the range of experiences we have discussed. Just think about it. Is it true, is it not true? I don’t know, I wasn’t there – I’m just telling you what they said. Another community member weighed in and this is what they said,

“There should be no stigma attached to being prescribed and using psychiatric medication for short or even long periods of time when it is indicated and prescribed by a physician adhering to relevant professional medical standards. But there are so many of these crazy stories coming out of OD where psychiatric medications are abused and professional medical standards are violated. What amazes me is that no one at the senior level is able to pull back and see the big picture. “Wait a minute... if so many of our folks end up ‘needing’ psychiatric drugs, maybe we’re doing something wrong. Maybe the system is broken and not the people.” I guess it doesn’t really amaze me. They’re fanatics and are unable to see what they’re doing. And they’re following in the footsteps of a “saint”.’

Under that same post, another community member weighed in and shared their “anecdotal and alleged” experience,

“When I left Opus Dei after being a numerary for about a decade and being medicated for the last 3 years, every outside doctor I saw was shocked by both the combination of drugs I was prescribed but also the very high dosage. Once I left the centre and stopped taking these medicines, my brain fog lifted (I didn’t even know it was there, I’d had it for so long) and all my symptoms improved dramatically. In the years since, I have had doctors confirm the diagnosis I was given in the Work, and I am not “cured”, but I’ve never even come close to the level of mental health crises or physical symptoms I suffered while in

the hands of doctors of the Work. I have also not needed nearly as much medical intervention or anything long term. Most of my residual mental health struggles are traced back to trauma related to my time in Opus Dei. It's the same story we keep hearing over and over again. I left Opus Dei in the 2010s, and only years later discovered how common my experience was. One of the Opus Dei doctors I saw for years was not a psychiatrist but prescribed me the high doses of psychiatric meds. The other was a psychiatrist who travelled from Spain to our region periodically to see the hordes of numeraries with a plethora of mental illnesses. Incidentally, the very first doctor of the Work that I ever went to was moderate and prudent. She did not prescribe me anything and wanted to do more tests, etc but then she left the Work. The sub-director of my centre at the time made a comment that it's "hard for these doctors to be faithful because they think they know better".'

On another post discussing various issues former members have with how Opus Dei is structured and run, several community members weighed in on the use and alleged abuse of psychotropic drugs within the institution. One individual said,

“...they are of the opinion that mental illnesses can be managed by drugs. They don't see that many times therapy with a professional counsellor is what is needed to talk through root issues and also that sometimes it could be a diet with too much sugar causing some problems.”

Another said,

“It's worse. They drug you if you think “bad thoughts.” They cause the mental imbalance. I remember I was called “mentally unbalanced” for merely questioning Opus, by an Opus priest, and I repeated his assessment several ways to be sure that was the sole cause of my “imbalance.” I told another friend on the phone I had deep issues with Opus, and his immediate response was to ask whether I thought about taking meds to help me. Drugs are their go-to only solution for the problems which they mostly cause (and in some cases it's not mental problems but just questioning Opus or trying to leave).”

Email & DM Submissions

Last but not least, I want to include a couple of DMs and emails that I've received since I announced that I would be focusing on this particular issue. The first I'll read came from someone I'll call Dani. Dani wrote that,

“In 2011, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety by a doctor of Opus Dei who was not a psychiatrist. A few months later, a psychiatrist doctor of Opus Dei confirmed the diagnoses and prescribed several medications to me. I took these “in obedience” from 2011 until early 2014, despite having left in 2013. I had been provided enough medication to continue taking them for months after I had left. When I was first diagnosed, the director kept all my drugs and gave them to me as needed but after some months, I had all my drugs with me and I took them as

prescribed. After I left, it took several months before I ran out of drugs and at that point I went to see a new psychiatrist and neurologist who were not affiliated with Opus Dei. In that first visit, I discovered that,

1. The antidepressants I was taking also had a strong sedative effect and the new psychiatrist did not think they were ideal for me for that reason.
2. Even if the particular type of antidepressants were justified (and the psychiatrist did not think that they were justified) I was taking a very high dose of the anti-depressants, about 3 times the dosage that the new psychiatrist would have considered normal for my symptoms and clinical history and also for the period of time I had been taking them.
3. I had several vitamin deficiencies that should have been checked and addressed before prescribing the psychiatric medicines.
4. In addition to anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication, I had been prescribed antipsychotic drugs by the Opus Dei doctor. This was also something the new psychiatrist found puzzling.

I was discontinued from all the previous medication and given low doses of new medication. Most of my symptoms resolved in less than one year after I left the Work. In the time since I left, while I had had instances of struggling with my mental health, I have not experienced anything close to the seriousness of the mental health issues I had while I was a numerary.”

Dani, if you are watching this now, what you went through sounds horrific, and I want you to know that you have my deepest sympathy. One of the details that stands out to me from this account is the fact that Dani didn't immediately have access to her own medication – they were kept from her and controlled and she was treated like a child. She wrote in her account about how her director initially kept all of her medication. I am speculating, but I am almost certain that director was not Dani's legal guardian. Dani was an adult. And I am, again, speculating, but I am also equally certain that the director was not trained in any type of medical care, beyond maybe basic first aid. Again, pure speculation, I have no idea, but based on what I have been told by other former members, my point is that these directors are not uniquely suited or divinely ordained to be everyone else's' Big Brother (although Opus Dei definitely wants its members to think they are).

The second message came from someone I'll call Tee. Tee wrote that while at her training center, “I was deeply depressed and very homesick, despite my troubled home life. I often complained to my ‘chatter’ about different physical difficulties I was experiencing, like amenorrhea (disappearing periods), headaches, painful breasts, and generalized pain in the body. I also mentioned that I was sure I had depression and anxiety. It took I believe at least five if not six years before I was allowed to see a doctor – who was of course a numerary. She assured me that I did not have depression but rather PMS, of course one of the symptoms of PMS is depression. I'm not sure why she insisted I wasn't experiencing this except perhaps she did not like to use the label. Anyway, she proceeded to prescribe me amitriptyline 150mg per day. I never saw an

MD outside of OD, I was never offered a follow-up or consultation with another doctor and this script was issued dosed to me for the following years that I remained in Opus Dei, I think five or seven years, but I can't be sure. I was simultaneously prescribed saline tablets to see if that would relieve the soreness in my breasts. It did not, but it did work to reduce my weight (Tee mentioned in another email that she also struggled with anorexia during her time in Opus Dei). Nobody ever checked or cared, I think I understood that I was not going to be taken seriously or given the attention I needed. The amitriptyline served to keep me zombified and subdued for the most part. I used to drink shots of very strong coffee just to get through the Mass and prayers, and ended up with shakes and tingles and involuntary jerks in my arms from the caffeine. Thankfully, this did not last long after. After I left Opus Dei, I stopped this antidepressant. Some years later I was again prescribed antidepressants and have had various types, some with better effects than others. However, never this again. In fact, my GP was horrified that I was on such a high dose and for so long without a review."

In my opinion, Opus Dei weaponizes mental health. It takes protocols and medications and weaponizes them to benefit whatever goal or issue is at hand. Everyone should have access to mental health care resources, but this ain't it. And for what it's worth, no one ever forgets their first bad experiences with medication, especially when it comes to mental health. Full disclosure here, because I don't think this should be stigmatized or seen as problematic, but I have taken different anti-depressants over the years myself. I have had a couple of medications that just did not agree with me and any benefit I might have gained was completely overpowered by the bad reaction that I had. On one of them, I remember that I felt like a zombie. It took me literal hours to get out of bed in the morning and get my life together. I had no energy. It 100% made everything worse, so I don't think we can stress how disastrous this type of medical malpractice is. Its tampering with someone's brain chemistry, an incredibly delicate balance of hormones that you do not want to needlessly tamper with. I've said it before and I'll say it again; this is how you kill someone or so irreparably fuck up someone's brain that they will never have stable mental health ever again.

Conclusion

It is tremendously difficult for me to come away from reading stories like these and see Opus Dei as anything other than predatory and opportunistic. I want to be so clear – I have a bias here. My bias is that Opus Dei should cease to exist because, in my opinion, from my position as a third-party outsider, never having been involved with Opus Dei, I find these stories compelling and more than a little alarming. I wasn't there and I have no irrefutable proof that these events took place, that people have been or are being drugged and deprived of liberty, but when I take in the full picture with everything that I know in full context, my gut tells me that this is all probably true too – in my opinion, from my point of view, this is pure speculation... you know.

We're going to call this episode part one of a little mini-series I'm doing on Opus Dei's drug problem. Consider this the tip of the Opus Dei drug abuse iceberg. I'm not doing that to

stretch this out or anything either, please know. If I could have fit everything into one episode, I would have, but I'll be honest.... I found a lot when I went digging. I found more than I expected to find. I started this research back in September, and here we are and it's almost the end of the year. But this is important and it's a story (or series of stories) that I believe deserve to be told. Similar to the Tissier case, it feels like an active effort has been made to keep this story from escaping Spain, and I think it may be for similar reasons.... So with that said, the next episode will be a deep dive into one of the individuals who has been accused of medical malpractice on the behalf of Opus Dei, someone who I discovered completely by accident. Let me know if you think that you know who I'm referring to.

So, that is where I am going to conclude things today. This is a very heavy topic, so I want to remind everyone that if you are in need of mental health support, I have left some resources and links in the description of this video. Life is hard, but we don't have to go into it totally unequipped. Therapy and counseling can be tremendously powerful tools, so please reach out.

I also want to acknowledge the slow pace that these videos come out. Everyone is very understanding, which I appreciate, but I want everyone to know that I do realize these episodes are a long time in coming out. I wish that I could pump these out faster, but the honest truth is that at least for this juncture in my life, that is simply not possible. I care about the quality of the work that I am doing and the research that I present, and I am just one woman, cramming this into a life that is very full and very busy. So, thank you for the continuing to show up and watch these episodes.

Thank you for making it to this point in the video and for all of the support. Seeing this channel grow and attract such wonderful, interesting people has been a wild experience. If you haven't already, please consider subscribing and giving this video a thumb's up. Despite the pace of uploads, I do have some exciting things on the horizon and I hope you'll stick around to see them. Links to connect with me on social media are down below. These videos take a lot of time and energy and I drink a lot of coffee while I write, so if you're interested in directly supporting my work, you can buy me a coffee for five dollars and the link is in the description of this episode. You do not have to, it's totally optional, and just liking this video and leaving a comment helps a ton, but I sincerely appreciate everyone who has bought me coffee up to this point. Those of you who bought me coffees last month are here on the screen and I would be happy to drink a cup of joe with any of you anytime! Thank you for being here and remember; nolite te bastardes carborundorum. Don't let the bastards drag you down.