

**The New York Times** | <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/sports/olympics/fbi-nassar-report.html>

## ***Inspector General Says F.B.I. Botched Nassar Abuse Investigation***

In a report released just before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, the inspector general found that the F.B.I. was delayed by more than a year in ramping up its investigation, allowing Mr. Nassar to abuse more victims.

**By Juliet Macur and Michael Levenson**

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The Justice Department’s inspector general released a long-awaited report on Wednesday that sharply criticized the F.B.I.’s handling of the sexual abuse case involving Lawrence G. Nassar, the former doctor for the U.S.A. Gymnastics national team and Michigan State sports, which led to Mr. Nassar’s continued abuse of girls and women.

Mr. Nassar, who is serving what amounts to life in prison, has been accused of abusing hundreds of female patients — including the Olympic champion Simone Biles and a majority of the last two United States women’s Olympic gymnastics teams — under the guise of medical treatment.

The report, citing civil court documents, said that 70 or more young athletes had been sexually abused by Mr. Nassar between July 2015, when U.S.A. Gymnastics first reported allegations against Mr. Nassar to the F.B.I.’s Indianapolis field office, and August 2016, when the Michigan State University Police Department received a separate complaint.

John Manly, a lawyer for many of the victims, said that number is likely even higher — about 120 patients, including one as young as 8 years old.

“This is a devastating indictment of the F.B.I. and the Department of Justice that multiple federal agents covered up Nassar’s abuse and child molestation,” Mr. Manly said. “They’ve failed these women. They’ve failed these families. No one seems to give a damn about these little girls.”

The inspector general’s report said senior F.B.I. officials in the Indianapolis field office failed to respond to the allegations “with the utmost seriousness and urgency that they deserved and required” and the investigation did not proceed until after a September 2016 report by The Indianapolis Star detailed Mr. Nassar’s abuse.

F.B.I. officials in the office also “made numerous and fundamental errors when they did respond” to the allegations and failed to notify state or local authorities of the allegations or take other steps to address the ongoing threat posed by Mr. Nassar, the report said.

According to the report, the special agent in charge of the Indianapolis field office, W. Jay Abbott, lied to the inspector general’s office numerous times when it asked him about the Nassar inquiry.

Mr. Abbott gave false statements “to minimize errors made by the Indianapolis Field Office in connection with the handling of the Nassar allegations,” the report said.

It also said Mr. Abbott violated F.B.I. policy when he spoke with Steve Penny, then the president and chief executive of U.S.A. Gymnastics, about potential job opportunities with the U.S. Olympic Committee, even as the two discussed the allegations against Mr. Nassar. Mr. Abbott later applied for a job at the U.S.O.C., but twice lied to the inspector general about seeking that job.

The Justice Department declined to prosecute Mr. Abbott, who retired in January 2018, and an unnamed supervisory special agent in Indianapolis in September 2020, according to the report.

Mr. Abbott has reviewed the report, according to his lawyer, Josh Minkler. “Mr. Abbott thanks the law enforcement officers and prosecutors who brought Larry Nassar to justice,” Mr. Minkler said in a statement. “Mr. Abbott hopes the courageous victims of Nassar’s horrible crime find peace.”

For Rachael Denhollander, a lawyer and a former gymnast who was the first person to publicly accuse Mr. Nassar of assault, the details in the report showed “an incredibly deep level of betrayal” that did not come as a surprise.

“When I came forward, I fully expected multiple levels of botched investigations and cover-ups because that’s what survivors are up against,” she said, adding that she assumed Mr. Nassar was abusing other women because he had worked with the national team for four years before abusing her, and she knew how abusers worked.

“This is what survivors are up against,” she said. “And they constantly get asked the question, ‘Why don’t survivors report?’ This is why.”

Earlier this year, on May 14, the Justice Department notified the inspector general that it was not opening a new investigation into whether the supervisory special agent had made false statements during interviews with the inspector general. The F.B.I. said that agent was no longer a supervisor and was not working on F.B.I. matters. It said the agent’s conduct was set for review by the bureau’s Office of Professional Responsibility.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, who worked with Senator Jerry Moran, Republican of Kansas, on a 2019 Senate investigation of the Nassar scandal, called the report “absolutely chilling” and a “gut punch to anyone who cares about effective law enforcement.” He suggested that the Senate hold hearings to hold the F.B.I. accountable, and said he wanted to know why F.B.I. agents had not been criminally charged for having made false statements.

Mr. Moran said he wanted to explore, in part, why the Justice Department had declined to prosecute anyone in the F.B.I.

The inspector general’s report is another damaging blow to the F.B.I.’s reputation. In 2019, the inspector general severely criticized the bureau for making many errors and omissions in a series of wiretap applications used in the F.B.I.’s Russia investigation. As part of that investigation, a former F.B.I. lawyer pleaded guilty to altering a document in the Russia inquiry.

The F.B.I. in a statement said it had made changes so that similar abuse allegations would be shared promptly within the bureau and with other law enforcement agencies.

### Summer Olympics Essentials

- **Olympics Guide:** It's been an unusual lead-up to this year's Olympics. Here's what you need to know about the Games.
- **Athletes:** These are the competitors you'll be hearing a lot about. Pick a few to cheer for!
- **Sports:** New sports this year include karate, surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing. Here's how every Olympic sport works.
- **Schedule:** Mark your calendars for your favorite events to watch.

"This should not have happened," the F.B.I. said. "The F.B.I. will never lose sight of the harm that Nassar's abuse caused. The actions and inactions of certain F.B.I. employees described in the report are inexcusable and a discredit to this organization."

Mr. Manly said the report would give the gymnasts some relief by knowing what happened in the case. But he said their families wanted accountability and the report did not provide any.

"All those families have to live with the consequences while Jay Abbott and his cohorts can just live the rest of their lives and go off into the sunset with their F.B.I. pensions," he said.

Even when the F.B.I.'s handling of the case came under scrutiny from Congress, the news media, and bureau headquarters in 2017 and 2018, Indianapolis officials did not take responsibility for their failures, the report said. Instead, it said, officials in the Indianapolis office provided "incomplete and inaccurate" information in response to the media and the agency's internal inquiries.

After the delays, the F.B.I. and local authorities ultimately found that Mr. Nassar had sexually assaulted more than 100 women and that he possessed child pornography, which led to convictions in federal and state courts, the report said.

More than 200 victims are suing U.S.A. Gymnastics, saying Mr. Nassar had sexually abused them, but those lawsuits were put on hold when the federation filed for bankruptcy in December 2018.

Earlier that year, the Nassar sexual abuse scandal shook the sport, and more than 150 girls and women testified at Mr. Nassar's initial sentencing hearing in a Michigan courtroom. Each confronted Mr. Nassar and described how they were hurt by the abuse. Many spoke through tears.

Reeling from the scandal, U.S.A. Gymnastics, the sport's governing body, filed for bankruptcy in 2018.

In 2020, the organization offered to pay \$215 million to settle legal claims brought by athletes who said they were sexually abused by Mr. Nassar. The offer came after more than 300 plaintiffs, including Olympic gymnasts, sued U.S.A. Gymnastics for failing to protect them from Mr. Nassar. This year's U.S. Olympic women's gymnastics team was headed to Tokyo when the report emerged Wednesday.

In 2019, a Senate report found that officials from the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, U.S.A. Gymnastics, Michigan State University and the F.B.I. “sat on evidence of his sexual misconduct for over a year — allowing for the additional sexual abuse of dozens of other girls.”

Adam Goldman contributed reporting, and Alain Delaquerière contributed research.