

Cold-Hearted Critics Crucify Duggars For Defending Son in Molestation Scandal in Fox Interview

Critics slammed Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar of TLC's reality show "19 Kids and Counting" on Thursday, a day after Fox News aired an interview in which the couple defended their son, who had molested his younger sisters when he was a teenager.

Since the abuse revelations surfaced last month, child protection advocates have charged that the Christian parents who star on TLC have downplayed their son's abuse of four of his sisters, including a girl who was under 10 at the time.

In an interview with Megyn Kelly of "The Kelly File," the Duggars said they were victims of a tabloid leak that dredged up long-forgiven offenses committed by their son, Josh Duggar, now 27. Some critics called the interview overly sympathetic to the conservative parents of 19 children from Arkansas.

The Duggars "found a predictably safe space to portray themselves as gravely concerned parents who did everything right," wrote Hank Stuever in The Washington Post on Thursday.

"Jim Bob seemingly sought to diminish what transpired," said Brian Lowry in trade magazine Variety.

Discovery Communications-owned cable network TLC had no comment on Thursday on the future of "19 Kids." Last month, TLC pulled all episodes of its top-rated show after the molestation reports surfaced. At least a dozen advertisers ditched the program.

The harsh reaction to the interview has put new pressure on

the network to make a decision about the future of the show. Experts said that if the Fox News appearance was part of an effort to help resurrect the program, it backfired.

The Duggars “have absolutely no future on American television,” said Jack Deschauer, vice president at crisis management firm Levick.

“Their whole brand was a loving, conservative, Christian family that lived life according to a very strict code of ethics,” he said. “How can you conserve that brand?”

The couple’s nearly hour-long interview, recounting incidents that occurred in their home 12 years ago, drew 3.1 million viewers, the highest-rated episode of “The Kelly File” this year. Jim Bob Duggar said Josh, then nearly 15, touched his sisters over their clothes because he was “curious about girls.”

“They hadn’t even known he had done it,” he said.

Fox News is to air a second interview Friday with Duggar daughters Jessa, 22, and Jill, 24, who said they were victims of their brother’s actions. It will provide another chance for TLC to gauge viewer interest in a spinoff show. Deschauer doubted that the Duggars can regain their audience.

The Duggars do have some supporters, however, including Mike Huckabee; Dr. Michael Brown; Duggar family pastor Ronnie Floyd and Tricia Goyer, a survivor of sexual abuse herself.

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