

Jehovah's Witnesses let 'repentant' child sex abusers return to church

Woman tells child sexual abuse inquiry her father repeatedly sexually abused her but church committee found her allegations unproven

Australian Associated Press

Monday 3 August 2015 04.05 BST

The Jehovah's Witnesses church let "repentant" child sex abusers return to the congregation, who were then kept in the dark about their crimes, an alleged abuse victim has claimed.

John de Rooy, an elder in a Mareeba, Queensland, congregation in the early 1990s, was on a church judicial committee which heard a complaint from a woman who alleged her father had abused her and her three sisters.

The woman, given the pseudonym BCG, has given evidence her father repeatedly sexually abused her but the church's committee found her allegations were unproven.

Last week BCG said the elders refused to accept the evidence of her sisters or her mother.

De Rooy, who is giving evidence at a royal commission hearing into abuse in the church, said on Monday he could not remember all the details of BCG's allegations, but he remembered believing her at the time and was "sickened" by what her father allegedly did.

He said all he could really remember was that it was "between her word against the father" and according to the church's biblical rules, two witnesses were needed to prove an offence.

De Rooy said BCG's father was "disfellowshipped" - excommunicated - for loose conduct and lying. He had left the family home and was living with another woman.

In an immediate appeal by BCG's father to being thrown out he confessed to molesting his daughters, yet the decision of the elders was that he should give up his pursuit of the other woman and return to the family home.

A few years later he was reinstated by the congregation.

De Rooy said the Witnesses gave BCG, who was still a member, lots of support.

Her father was jailed in 2004 for three years when his crimes against BCG were proved in court - more than 10 years after she went to the elders, who never reported him to secular authorities.

De Rooy explained that a repentant child abuser is not disfellowshipped by the Jehovah's Witness church but will be "reproved", meaning allowed to stay in the congregation with certain restrictions.

An unrepentant child abuser would be excommunicated.

He said reasons for reproof are not explained to the congregation.

Angus Stewart SC, counsel advising the commission, asked the witness how this practice was consistent with De Rooy's evidence the church had zero tolerance for child sex abuse.

De Rooy said the repentant abuser would be monitored and the elders would keep an eye on him.

He agreed that would not be possible in the home but said the family could talk to elders.

More news

Topics

Royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse

Child protection

Children