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1. ITV Report
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Jehovah's Witness sex abuse victims call for organisation to be held accountable



Karen Morgan wants the governing body of the Jehovah's Witness organisation to be held accountable for the abuse she suffered as a child. *Photo: Wales This Week*

The Jehovah's Witness organisation has often been described as the "greatest preaching campaign the world has ever known". They are a close-knit community of evangelical Christians well known for going door to door, handing out literature about their faith. They do not have blood transfusions, serve in the military, celebrate Christmas or birthdays. But now, claims are emerging from some past and present members of the church that there may be a pattern of sex abuse that the organisation has not only failed to report but has actually helped to keep from the authorities.



The judge said Sewell had abused his position power as an elder in the Jehovah's Witnesses to exploit and abuse women and children. *Credit: Wales This Week*

In June, 53-year-old Mark Sewell from Barry was jailed for 14 years after being found guilty of eight historic sex offences. The judge at Merthyr Crown Court said Sewell had used his position of power as an elder in the Jehovah's Witnesses to exploit and abuse women and children. There have been 25 similar convictions in Jehovah's Witness congregations across the UK in the last four years. Two of Mark Sewell's victims have waived their rights to anonymity and have spoken to talk to Wales This Week after claiming the organisation has kept allegations of abuse hidden. **Wales This Week - Witness to The Truth, Tonight at 8pm on ITV Cymru Wales.**



Karen Morgan was abused by her uncle from the age of 12. *Credit: Wales This Week*

Karen Morgan was 12 when Mark Sewell started abusing her. Karen and her family were members of the Kingdom Hall in Barry. As another member of the congregation, Mark Sewell was not only a brother to them in church terms, he also became a real member of the family after he married Karen's aunt.

He would sort of lay next to me and pull me up on top of him and he would get into bed with me in the night wearing just his underpants. He came into the bathroom when I was in the shower.

– *Karen Morgan, Victim*

She reported it to her parents but she was told she had misunderstood her uncle's affections.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the bible is the literal translation of God's word. It says when a brother has sinned, you should first confront him before going elsewhere.

If your brother commits a sin, go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother. But if he does not listen, take along one or two more, in order that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter be established.

– *Matthew: Chapter 18 verses 15-16*

Karen was now in a particularly awkward situation, as she had to face Sewell in a series of meetings, at HIS home.

Mark Sewell was an elder in the organisation. Which placed him in a position of considerable trust. It was Karen's word against his and so Karen spent the next two years feeling ignored and disbelieved.



Marc and Cora Latham help run Advocates for the Awareness of Watchtower Abuses, AAWA.

Credit: Wales This Week

Marc and Cora are two former Jehovah's Witnesses who campaign to give a voice to victims like Karen. Based in Cheltenham, the couple helped launch Advocates for the Awareness of Watchtower Abuses, or AAWA.



The Watchtower is the governing body all of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is based in New York. *Credit: Wales This Week*

The Watchtower is the Jehovah's headquarters in New York. Marc and Cora feel the church is instilling a culture of undue influence which violates the basic human rights of its members, especially in the protection of children. They say a series of letters and a secret handbook purely for the eyes of elders looks at protecting the organisation first and foremost over and above that of the victim.

We are trying to change the whole policy of the the way that they look at the individual that is being accused because this is somebody that can continue to carry on abusing people. They don't see it as a crime, they see it as a sin, they see it as a weakness of that person.

They also say that:

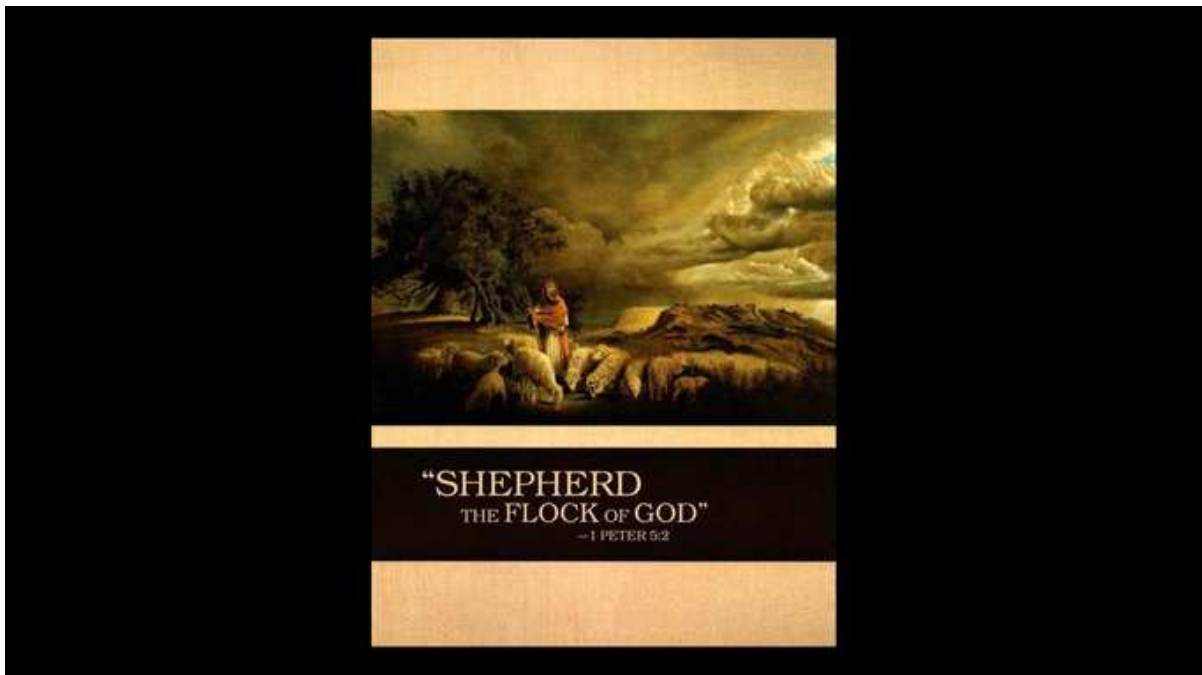
The secrecy surrounding any allegations of abuse around molestation or rape were, are so tightly controlled by the organisation that most Jehovah's Witness, your average witness does not know anything about it.

– *Marc and Cora, Advocates for the Awareness of Watchtower Abuses*

Marc and Cora say the fundamental reasons there is such an issue revolve around the misguided application of the two witness rule and the instruction that elders must handle accusations internally rather than go straight to the police.

They have this two witness rule which covers everything so it could be someone smoked, they would have to be seen by two separate people. Or it could be a child has been abused and that abuse would have to be seen by two separate people and when does anybody ever see a child get abused.

– *Karen Morgan, Victim*



Shepherd The Flock of God is a manual handed to all elders. *Credit: Wales This Week*

The book tells elders they should never suggest that a victim should not go to the police. It says they should inform victims that it's their personal decision. However, it clearly states this information should only be given if directly asked and only after guidance has been sought from the branch office, or Bethel.

Karen spent 20 years fighting to be believed as she did not have another witness. It was only 17 years later after 3 other women came forward that she was successful in getting Mark Sewell before a jury.

The Jehovah's Witness Organisation say that they have "an absolute and unequivocal abhorrence of child abuse", they "work in harmony with the law" and "do not condone" child abuse under any circumstance. They also do not "shield from the authorities anyone committing offences of this nature."

They went on to say that they "support any victim or parent who reports this horrible crime to the authorities". And that "such authorities have the absolute right to investigate, try and punish criminals."

In relation to the Mark Sewell case specifically, the church claims that "he has not been a member of the Barry Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, nor has he been in any position of responsibility, for twenty years." They say "It is a matter of public record that when allegations of child abuse involving his family members first surfaced, the police were informed and investigated the case." They were also "not aware of any congregation or one of its members obstructing police inquiries. Such would be contrary to their beliefs, practices and child safeguarding policy."

The Home Office has ordered a major inquiry into why historic cases of child abuse have been hidden for so long. Now Karen and AAWA have called for the Jehovah's Witness organisation to be scrutinised as part of that investigation.

The Home Office told us it was still early days and that:

Details of what will and will not be included in the scope of the inquiry will be clearer after the terms of reference are set

– *Home Office Spokesperson*

With Sewell now firmly behind bars, Karen and his victims are looking to hold the governing body of the Jehovah's Witnesses responsible for what has happened.



Candace Conti was abused by a fellow Jehovah's Witness at the age of 9. *Credit: Candace Conti*

They have employed a firm which is part of a network that recently helped 28 year old Candace Conti from California win a landmark ruling against the organisation. She won 28 million dollars in damages, after she was abused by another Jehovah's Witness at the age of 9 years old.

To hear more of this story catch **Wales This Week - Witness to The Truth, Tonight at 8pm** on **ITV Cymru Wales**.

For further information:

[JW.org](#) [AAWA](#)

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