



## Mandatory reporting call to tackle Jehovah's Witnesses child sex abuse

Survivors of child sex abuse are campaigning for the **UK government** to introduce mandatory reporting laws to help tackle abuse within Jehovah's Witnesses communities.

The faith group is known to regard sex abuse as a "sin" that can be investigated by a judicial committee – but these are only established if there are two witnesses of wrongdoing.

However, this "two-witness rule" is applied only to congregational discipline and elders are expected to make a report to the authorities in countries with mandatory reporting laws.

The group's child abuse policy states: "In addition to making a report to the branch office, the elders may be required by law to report even uncorroborated or unsubstantiated allegations to the authorities. If so, we expect the elders to comply."

**Nick French**, 43, a survivor of child sex abuse within the Jehovah's Witnesses, said: "What a faith group like the Jehovah's Witnesses would say about child abuse is they still view it as a sin, rather than a crime.

"In this day and age, as soon as a crime is reported it needs to go to the people who are qualified to deal with such a crime. It shouldn't be kept within the confines of society."

**Kathleen Hallisey, senior solicitor with AO Advocates** said mandatory reporting would be a significant help in putting away repeat offenders among Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ms Hallisey said: "I think it's a very difficult situation for government to intervene in private religious matters.

"The way around that is to introduce mandatory reporting that in essence would mean the moment an accusation is made within the Jehovah's Witnesses, that would immediately be turned over to the authorities.

"If there hadn't been the two-witness rule and the Jehovah's Witnesses had reported the allegation of child sexual abuse to the police, the great likelihood is that my client and many others would not have been abused by that same person."

child sex abuse, Jehovah's Witnesses, Kathleen Hallisey, Mandatory reporting October 5, 2015

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