

# 'There were 12 elders and not one of them stood up – not one': Victim of Jehovah's Witness rapist describes torment

Women told how 'excruciating' it was to have to tell congregation elders what had happened to them... but that nothing was done

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Mark Sewell

Victims of a sexual predator who preyed on fellow Jehovah's Witnesses had to face their alleged abuser in hearings organised by their church.

The "vulnerable" victims – including a woman pinned down and raped by heavy-set former church elder Mark Sewell and a schoolgirl whom he kissed and fondled – were even banned from talking about their allegations.

At least two of Sewell's victims in the Barry congregation had to lock eyes with him during "judicial committee" hearings run by the church when they reported his depraved attacks.

When faced with his first victim – then just a teenage schoolgirl – Sewell branded her a "liar" and rubbished her claims.

It was during this investigation that the elders received another complaint about Sewell, with a woman in the congregation claiming he had raped her.

They included the complaint in the investigation but the businessman, now 53, twice contacted her "in an attempt to stop her telling the judicial committee the truth", prosecutor Sarah Waters told the jury during the trial opening.

Sewell **has now been convicted of a string of sex abuse allegations, including rape** .

The first victim claimed after her family had contacted the congregation elders about Sewell they were asked to attending a meeting at the Kingdom Hall in Gibbonsdown, Barry.

"Prior to it we had been told not to mention it to anybody, not to tell anyone about it," she said in her evidence in court.

The victim, who cannot be identified, also told the court she was not necessarily aware if there were other complaints at the same time.

"All of us were told we were not allowed to talk about it," she added.

Her account was backed up by a close friend who gave evidence. When asked whether her friend had talked to her about the judicial committee investigation she repeatedly said: "She wasn't allowed to."

The friend, now a woman in her 30s, told the court: "When you are a Witness the elders will deal with problems within the congregation.

"As a Witness myself you trust them to deal with them and you don't get involved in the details and you leave it to them."

Judge Richard Twomlow asked: "Once a problem goes to the elders then the congregation is not allowed to discuss it?"

She replied: "No. If there was a big problem you would have sermons to deal with trust and what elders positions mean and gossip. It was very, very strict."

The judge then said: "So gossip wasn't just discouraged, it was positively disallowed?"

The woman answered: "You could be disciplined as a Witness for gossiping."

A young girl forced to strip down for half-naked massages by Sewell in his bedroom said "everything was unspoken" in the congregation and those involved "weren't allowed to talk about things".

She added: "That's the impression at the time – I thought it was a cover-up."

The victim raped by Sewell in a brutal attack which saw her knickers "shredded" described being grilled by church elders when she came forward years after the attack.

"I had to go through everything that happened to me just as you are doing now," she said in evidence.

"They asked me some questions as to what led up to it, why he did what he did, why I didn't report it.

"They also asked me what position my legs were in when Mark attacked me – why, I don't know.

"I had to explain how far apart my legs were which I found excruciatingly embarrassing."

She added that Sewell claimed it would have been impossible for him to have raped her while she was in that position.

He knew, she claimed he said, because he had tried to re-enact the incident with his wife with her legs positioned the same way.

"In the end it was Mark's word against mine and Mark denied everything and that nearly sent me over the edge."

In the aftermath, she told the court, Sewell "rang and threatened me and said if I went to the police he was going to take me to court".

She dabbed her eyes with a tissue as she told the court: "I couldn't function, couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, and I think the worst thing for me was that nobody would believe me."

At the time of the committee hearing, she said, the father of Sewell's first victim told the congregation elders to "examine their consciences" and report the matter to the police.

“There were 12 elders and not one of them stood up – not one,” the rape victim said.

The woman described the way she and her fellow victims had been “looked at with disregard and he is walking around with his head held high” following the claims.

She said she contacted the church again subsequently to warn them about Sewell.

“They have a man in their midst who is a rapist, is a paedophile. He has never gone to prison, never answered to his crimes, never had treatment, so therefore they in my opinion are putting the rest of the congregation at risk.”

A church spokesman said: “As Jehovah’s Witnesses we have an absolute and unequivocal abhorrence of child abuse and [offer] our support for any victim or parent who reports this crime to the authorities. This is in line with what the Bible says at Romans 12:9.

“We feel that the care and safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare is extremely important.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses act in harmony with the law and do not condone child abuse in any circumstance or endeavour to shield from the authorities those committing offences of this nature.”

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