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## 'Trusted' Jehovah's Witness 'raped and sexually abused girls'

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By Jane Reader

A TRUSTED senior figure in Bournemouth Jehovah's Witness community raped and sexually abused children over a period of nearly 17 years, a court heard yesterday.

Barry Furlong, a former fireman, attacked four girls – the youngest aged just five – who didn't report what had happened to them for many years because they feared they would not be believed, Bournemouth Crown Court was told.

Now 69-year-old, Furlong, of Keeble Crescent, Kinson, is accused of four charges of rape, four of indecent assault and six of indecency with a child, alleged to have been committed between December 1979 and November 1996.

He denies all of the charges.

Opening the case for the prosecution, Mark Worsley said Furlong, a father-of-two, held a top position as Ministerial Servant at the time of the offences.

A jury of six men and six women was told: "The allegations take place in the context of the Jehovah's Witness congregation in Kinson at the time in Bournemouth.

"When a person gets to that level, the abused children found it impossible at the time to disclose what had happened to them.

"Why would anyone believe what they had to say against the word of a trusted man like Barry Furlong?"

Mr Worsley stressed it was not a trial about Jehovah's Witnesses but "a trial about a number of children within that context".

The jury was told that it would hear from one victim who claims that she was 10 years old when she was sexually assaulted.

Mr Worsley said: "He told her not to tell anyone else or she would not get into the New Order, a term for a kind of heaven. She didn't tell anyone because the defendant had told her not to."

Speaking of the alleged victim of the offences of rape, Mr Worsley added: "He was a pillar of the community – who would believe her? She also felt ashamed that this was happening to her. She knew what he was doing was not right."

The trial continues.

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