



In England, more accusations that Jehovah's Witnesses hid sex abuse



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Claims that Jehovah's Witnesses hide child sexual abuse from secular authorities have surfaced again in England.

[The Daily Mail reported last week \(http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3377449/Jehovah-s-Witness-strangled-girls-young-six-sexual-thrills-finally-jailed-congregation-covered-crimes-20-years.html\)](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3377449/Jehovah-s-Witness-strangled-girls-young-six-sexual-thrills-finally-jailed-congregation-covered-crimes-20-years.html) that Ian Pheasey, a 54-year-old Jehovah's Witness, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for choking young girls for sexual gratification in the 1990s.

Prosecutor Nicholas Taplow said that Pheasey's victims were told to keep quiet and that "the matter was swept under the carpet by the church."

Meanwhile, in the North Sea coastal town of Hartlepool, England, an ex-Jehovah's Witness [told The Northern Echo \(http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14168160/Former_Jehovah_Witness_from_Hartlepool_agrees_to_be_interviewed_as_part_of_nationwide_investigation_into_the_church/\)](http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14168160/Former_Jehovah_Witness_from_Hartlepool_agrees_to_be_interviewed_as_part_of_nationwide_investigation_into_the_church/) last month that his former religion endangers children.

"It is very difficult for people, maybe young people, in the church to go to the police," said Steve Rose, who claims the Witnesses have kicked him out and shunned him.

According to the Echo, Rose has been providing information to a government commission investigating allegations that Jehovah's Witnesses policies fail to protect children from sexual abuse.

For years, the Witnesses have defended lawsuits on at least three continents claiming that they shield child abusers from prosecution. But more recently, government agencies have taken notice and begun investigating the religion's [policy of not reporting child abuse to law enforcement \(https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/\)](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/) except when required by law.

The Charity Commission, which regulates charities in England and Wales, [launched its investigation \(https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-investigates-jehovahs-witnesses-charities\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-investigates-jehovahs-witnesses-charities) 18 months ago, amid a series of high-profile prosecutions in England. Most notable were the cases involving Mark Sewell, a Jehovah's Witness who was convicted in 2014 of eight sex offenses, including the sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl.

[According to The Mirror \(http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/jehovahs-witnesses-sex-abuse-scandal-4422943\)](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/jehovahs-witnesses-sex-abuse-scandal-4422943), elders in Sewell's congregation dismissed allegations against him and destroyed evidence of his crimes.

Kathleen Hallisey, an attorney representing Sewell's victims, has 10 lawsuits pending against the Witnesses but says she hopes the commission's work can bring systemic change.

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The investigator has reached out to many survivors and has a true understanding of the particular issues that victims of sexual abuse in the Jehovah's Witness organization face," she told Reveal. "I am hopeful that his dedication and diligence in pursuing this investigation will lead to real change in the Watchtower's child protection policies."

The Charity Commission's spokeswoman, Sarah Miller, told Reveal in an email that investigators would not comment on the inquiry because it is ongoing.

The developments in England have coincided with an [inquiry by the Australian Royal Commission](https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/>) that found that the Witnesses in that country had failed to report more than 1,000 alleged child sexual abusers to secular authorities. The commission has referred some of those cases to law enforcement authorities.

There is no indication that federal authorities in the U.S. are investigating the Witnesses' child abuse policies.

The Witnesses are currently fighting more than a dozen child abuse lawsuits in the U.S. Officials at the religion's headquarters in New York have acknowledged that they've collected the names and locations of alleged child abusers in their congregations for almost 20 years. The organization has violated subpoenas to produce those records in at least two California lawsuits.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials have declined Reveal's repeated requests for interviews as [we've investigated the organization's policies](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/>). Instead, they have issued public statements claiming that [they do not protect child abusers](https://www.revealnews.org/blog/24232/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/24232/>) and that victims always have the right to report their abuse to secular authorities.

They declined this week to comment on recent developments in the U.K.

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