

NEWS

Abuse victim plea for Jehovah's Witness inquiry

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A founder of a sexual abuse charity is calling for an inquiry into the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation.

Peter Saunders said there should be a "broad" investigation into the religious group which he says has serious questions to answer.

An independent abuse watchdog has said it will carefully consider investigating.

The religious organisation said it did not "shield" abusers and suggestions of a cover-up were "absolutely false".

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The plea follows a BBC Hereford and Worcester investigation last year which uncovered claims of child abuse within the organisation.

Mr Saunders, 61, who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a family member, teacher and two Catholic priests, is the founder of the National Association for People Abused in

Childhood (NAPAC) and is currently participating in the Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse (IICSA) victims and survivors consultative panel.

IICSA was set up in 2015 to investigate institutions that fail to protect children from sexual abuse. It is currently investigating the Anglican and Catholic churches.

In a statement it said it had "received correspondence raising concerns about child sexual abuse within Jehovah's Witnesses organisations" and that it would "carefully consider calls for a specific investigation."

Mr Saunders said: "Speaking personally and with my NAPAC hat on, we've had Jehovah's Witness survivors of abuse coming to us for some years so from a personal angle I would love to see such an investigation take place.

"I know the inquiry is stretched looking at the two biggest established religious institutions, the Anglican and Catholic churches but I would just hope in the future there would be resources available to look at other institutions including the Jehovah's Witnesses because there certainly are serious questions that need answering about that institution."

He added: "At the beginning of the inquiry there were people saying it was too big, too broad.

"Now three years down the line, we are all recognising it needed to be that broad, and subject to resources, now needs to be even broader."

Jehovah's Witnesses are members of a movement best known for their door-to-door evangelistic work.

In 2013 the Charity Commission started an inquiry into safeguarding issues in the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain - the UK's main Jehovah's Witnesses organisation which the commission regulates.

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