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Jehovah's Witness church leader facing jail after being convicted of rape

Mark Sewell's victims were forced to face their attacker in 'judicial' hearings organised by church elders

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Mark Sewell - Former church leader

A Jehovah's Witness church leader has been convicted of a string of historic sex charges.

Mark Sewell, 53, of Barry, near Cardiff, was convicted of seven indecent assaults and one rape, between 1987 and 1995.

He faces a "substantial" jail term when sentenced at Merthyr Tydfil crown court on Wednesday.

During his trial, the court heard how Sewell, a former Butlins holiday camp driver, of Porthkerry Road in Barry, used his "position of power" as an elder in the congregation to "exploit and abuse" women and children, according to [Wales Online](#).

Prosecutor Sarah Waters said he had used his influence "to perpetrate such sexual abuse over a number of years for his own sexual gratification".

His victims – including a woman he raped and a schoolgirl he kissed and fondled – even had to face their abuser during 'judicial committee' hearings organised by the church when they reported the 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.

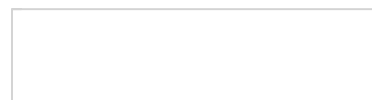
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The first victim claimed, after her family had contacted the congregation elders about Sewell, they were asked to attend a meeting at the Kingdom Hall in Gibbonsdown, Barry.

“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.”

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 an attack so brutal attack 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.”

The victim told the court that, in the aftermath, 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.”

she said that, at the time of the committee hearing, 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,” he added.



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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, saying: “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.”

Following the trial, 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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