

# Protests highlight abuse and cover-ups among Jehovah's Witnesses

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Protesters have gathered in London to highlight "serious and persistent" child sexual abuse within global Jehovah's Witnesses communities and JW leaders' failure to report it to the police.

Members of the group [JW Protest](#) have protested over the last two weekends at the ExCel centre in London's Docklands. The first gathering, on 11 and 12 August, coincided with a major JW convention and attracted over 100 people from 13 countries.

The protesters strongly criticised a procedure set by the main JW governing body known as the '[two witness rule](#)'. This means elders of a congregation will only act if there are two witnesses to any 'sin' committed.

A committee of the protesters passed a resolution calling on the JW governing body to acknowledge victims' "pain and suffering" and take action to prevent further cover-ups.

The protests also highlighted the problems associated with shunning, the procedure under which people are removed from JW congregations as punishment for perceived transgressions. Several protesters said those who reported child abuse had been shunned.

The protesters said they were mostly "stumbled, faded, former or ex members of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses", along with their loved ones.

Louise Goode, a JW Protest committee member, said the group had "tried to engage the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watch Tower Society [a group which supports JW's work] in every way possible".

"Even when they have been fined millions of dollars in the USA for concealing child sexual abuse records, and have been ordered to pay massive legal costs in the UK, they stated they will never change their policies. We have been left with no other option but to make our voices heard through our democratic right to peaceful protest."

She added that JW Protest hoped the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) would include the Jehovah's Witnesses in its inquiry. IICSA has recently heard evidence concerning abuse and cover-ups in institutions including the [Church of England](#) and the [Catholic Church](#).

Australia's recent royal commission on institutional responses to child sexual abuse recently [found](#) there had been over 1,800 victims and 1,006 alleged perpetrators among Jehovah's Witnesses since 1950. JW elders did not report a single instance of abuse to the police. The JW community in Australia has just 68,000 members.

Recent reports have also suggested a serious problem with child abuse among Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK. In March the *Guardian* [reported](#) that more than 100 people had approached it with allegations of abuse and mistreatment.

Some identified cultural barriers to the reporting of physical and psychological abuse and said JW leaders had hidden abuse from the police. Kathleen Hallisey, a senior abuse solicitor who works on behalf of alleged victims, told the paper the two witness rule meant reports of abuse "are usually dismissed".

In 2015 the High Court [ordered](#) the JW organisation to pay more than £700,000 in damages and costs to a woman it failed to protect from abuse. Last year the Charity Commission severely [criticised](#) Jehovah's Witnesses for allowing a convicted sex offender to interrogate his victims.

And earlier this month Dutch media [reported](#) that Jehovah's Witnesses had refused to hand over documents in which an ex-member had admitted abusing a child to the public prosecutor in the Netherlands.

National Secular Society spokesperson Chris Sloggett said the protesters had "shone a light on a shocking series of practices".

"Again and again we see, in various religious traditions and in many parts of the world, religious leaders putting the interests of their institutions ahead of the protection of children and vulnerable people.

"These protests should serve as a reminder of the need for genuine accountability for religious abusers and those who cover up abuse within religious groups. The secular authorities must expose and prosecute religious abusers and leaders who know about abuse and hide it away."

The NSS is calling for a mandatory reporting law, which would mean those who know about child abuse and fail to inform the authorities would be committing a criminal offence.

The practice of shunning from Jehovah's Witnesses congregations is the subject of the recently-released film *Apostasy*, which has [received](#) a [series](#) of positive [reviews](#).

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