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Rabbis Investigation Allegations of Sex Offenders

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I feel the need to share something that is pretty scary. The only way anything will change is by each person reading this article taking action. Your voice is vitally important, without it nothing will ever be different. I'm also asking you forward the following information to everyone you know.

Over the last several years, I've been hearing story after story in observant communities of allegations being made of sexual abuse and assault (*including professional sexual misconduct and clergy abuse*).

As we all know, it's extremely difficult for someone to tell another that they have been sexually violated by a trusted individual (*alleged offenders include parents, grandparents, teachers, camp counselors, baby-sitters, etc.*). It becomes even more difficult for a survivor to come forward when the alleged offender is someone respected in the community and or is even a rabbi.

Usually if a survivor of sexual violence shares their experience with someone, it will be someone they believe they can trust. What happens in the more insulated communities is that when a survivor makes his or her disclosures, they will be encouraged to go to their local orthodox rabbi for help.

Unfortunately, very few rabbis have the training, education and or knowledge in how to handle these types of situations. All too often, a survivor will walk away feeling blamed and shamed.

There have been too many occurrences of someone in the orthodox community sharing their stories and being encouraged by their rabbis **NOT** to do anything; and then being told that the rabbi will handle the situation. There is a serious problem when this happens. Alleged offenders often go on and abuse and or assault someone else.

I personally have not met one single rabbi (orthodox, conservative, reform, traditional, etc.) who has been trained to conduct forensic and or victim sensitive interviews. I have also not met a single rabbi who is trained in collecting forensic evidence in cases of possible sex crimes. It is also extremely rare that a rabbi, synagogue or rabbinical organization will refer victims to the police or hire private agencies trained to conduct forensic investigations.

We **NEED** to **DEMAND** that all rabbis should refer these cases to the proper authorities immediately. It should be up to law enforcement officials to determine if there is enough evidence for criminal charges to be pressed. It should also be up to legal authorities to determine if a case is valid or not. If the allegations of abuse/assault are too old, rabbis need to encourage survivors to contact their local rape crisis centers to learn about what other options they may have.

I want to encourage everyone to start asking the rabbis in their community about the current systems they have in place

when allegations are made. Please make it a point to ask:

1. If the rabbi has personally conducted investigations of possible sex crimes themselves?
2. If they have, what process do they go through to make a determination if a case is valid or not?
3. If the rabbi determined the allegations are valid:
 - a) What happens to the alleged offender?
 - b) What happens to the alleged survivor?
4. If the rabbi determined the allegations were not valid:
 - a) What happens to the alleged offender?
 - b) What happens to the alleged survivor?

I've spoken to several different rabbis over the last few years. Many have stated they can look in the eyes of someone making the accusations, and can tell if they are telling the truth or not. Several of the rabbis I've spoken to, have determined most cases were not valid by utilizing this method.

I have also been told if a survivor has had any sort of psychiatric history, they will usually determine the allegations **NOT** be valid. They automatically presume the allegations are most likely a "delusion of the woman or man" -- and brush off the claims.

There have also been a few occasions where the rabbi had told me "there was no need to conduct an investigation." The rabbi would explain that they "personally know the accused individual", and basically because the alleged offender is a friend, "the allegations are false."

We as a people and as a community need to demand changes be made immediately. We need to demand that when an individual makes allegations of a sex crime, that the individual be referred immediately to a local rape crisis center. These centers are networked with local police departments, and can also offer legal advocacy. The majority of rape crisis centers are more than willing to work with and become sensitive to the needs of the orthodox community. If you or your community need help building a bridge with your local rape crisis center, please contact The Awareness Center, and we will be more than willing to help.