

**tvnz.co.nz****EXCLUSIVE: Brethren molestation claims**

Apr 19, 2007

A senior member of the Exclusive Brethren church is under police investigation after allegedly molesting children over four decades.



After a six-month ONE News investigation, it has been revealed that four women, all former members of the church, laid complaints against the man, claiming they were abused when they were aged between five and 10.

The alleged abuse stretches back decades. The eldest complainant is now 61 years old, and the youngest in her mid 20s.

The church's Australia-based spokesman Tony McCorkell has been in New Zealand this week, reportedly investigating the claims himself, although he has not admitted that this is the purpose of his visit.

"If there is a claim then the church has a moral and a legal, maybe,...obligation to look at it depending on the circumstances, but certainly the church wouldn't seek to cover that situation up," says McCorkell

McCorkell says the Exclusive Brethren takes sexual abuse claims seriously. However, it is understood that two of the women who spoke-out when they were abused were ignored by New Zealand church leaders.

ONE News has been told the current world leader of the sect Bruce Hales also knows, but has failed to act - although McCorkell does not believe Hales is, in fact, aware.

"I think that Exclusive Brethren would deal with it like any other responsible citizen would. I mean the church would abhor any situation where child abuse was covered up," says McCorkell.

McCorkell also says he is not aware that the claims were covered up by leaders in the church.

"I don't have any information to that effect. But if that information comes to light then the church would obviously deal with that," he says.

The four women now live in different parts of the country and were unaware of each other's cases until recently. They came forward following previous revelations on ONE News that the church covered-up sexual abuse over several decades.

"I would say there's multiple offenders. If I went and asked them now they would try and deny it because in there it's a huge fear and guilt thing," says former Exclusive Brethren member known as Philippa.

"Perhaps a lot of people in there who have got this problem and been involved in this sort of thing would not go outside of the church for help".

The Exclusive Brethren says it will not act on rumours and says it wants names so it can deal with the matter.

Police are yet to speak with the accused but suspect many more victims may come forward.

Source: One News

**TVNZ**