

Abuse comes to light: Hasidim silence on perverts cracking

BY ALISON GENDAR , SIMONE WEICHSELBAUM / DAILY NEWS POLICE BUREAU /

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Just before last Thanksgiving, a 13-year-old [Brooklyn](#) girl told her parents she had been molested. They didn't go to police.

Her dad went straight to their rabbi.

The religious leader told him to go to another rabbi for guidance. The frantic couple spoke to two more rabbis before taking their advice: Talk to cops.

"I wanted to find the right way to go about this without traumatizing my daughter any further," the 32-year-old mom told the Daily News.

"I knew if I called the police, they would ask us to come down to the precinct. It would become public knowledge and my daughter would have to retell the story over and over again."

The family met privately with a detective and a prosecutor, and authorities charged a 59-year-old neighbor, [Arye Ickovits](#), with sexually abusing the young teen after luring her into his bedroom.

As crimes go, the Dec. 3 arrest was so run-of-the mill, it barely made headlines. But until recently, it might not have happened at all.

Sexual abuse in [New York](#)'s Hasidic community was almost never reported to

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police for fear of shaming the victim and exposing the insular world's less savory elements.

Advocates say that wall of silence is starting to crumble.

"They are coming to terms, standing up and saying, 'No more sweeping the abuse under the rug; no more denial. We need to deal with it, to face it, and to protect our children,'" said [Assemblyman Dov Hikind \(D-Brooklyn\)](#).

Since October, at least four men living in Brooklyn's Hasidic enclaves have been charged with sexually abusing children, ranging in age from 7 to 15.

"In the past few months, communication between the community and law enforcement has improved, there is more sharing of information," said a law enforcement source who works with the Brooklyn Jewish community.

One of Orthodox Judaism's biggest political champions, Hikind is hosting a forum today where mental health experts and rabbinical leaders will openly address the problem.

The purpose is "to say to victims of sexual abuse, 'We are sorry we didn't see your pain,'" Hikind said.

Even with recent progress, investigators say it is tough to navigate the closed culture.

Just as the "stop snitching" mantra hides crimes in the hip-hop world, a similar code of silence keeps Hasidic families from talking to cops.

They fear being branded a *moser* - a violator of religious law that forbids Jews from informing on each other.

"If the family goes to the police, the family is worried that they can't send their kids to yeshivas, they worry that they can't marry off their daughters, they worry that they will be known as traitors," said one police source.

"The only way to stop it, is to stop people that offend, and that is to go through the criminal justice system," the source said.

During a recent interview with The News, Ickovits said he asked the teen to help him up the stairs of his home, where he did nothing wrong.

"She helped me. She came in, and I told her goodbye and she ran away," said

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Ickovits, who uses a walker. "She gave me a kiss and I gave her a kiss and she ran home."

Ickovits also said he handed the girl cash in exchange for helping him up the stairs.

Some in the community have said it was cruel to lock up Ickovits, a stroke survivor in frail health, but the victim's mom has ignored them.

"Everybody has a responsibility to come forward and speak up when they know that a child is being hurt," the mother said.

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