

## **He masterminded systematic rape of over 100 kids' Jerusalem Post - 1-20-12**

**Nahlaot community reels from largest pedophile abuse case in nation's history; at least three of 10 suspects remain free.**



Nahalot mothers work on Seven Species mural 311. (photo credit:Melanie Lidman)

Members of the haredi community in the capital's Nahlaot neighborhood are calling it "The Holocaust." At least 10 pedophiles molested more than 100 children for six years, reaching nearly every family in this close-knit community.

One mother couldn't figure out why her two sons would get hysterical every time she left the house, begging her not to go. They were chewing their clothes to pieces and having uncontrollable outbursts. She brought them to different doctors and psychologists to try to determine what was wrong, but no one could figure it out.

Then community doctors started seeing strange marks, possibly indicative of abuse, on many of the children. Finally, one young boy was injured in a way that was unmistakably sexual abuse. He was the one who finally broke the silence, and talked about the horrific abuse happening in the neighborhood.

Members of the community call this “the miracle.”

“Rivka,” a mother who lives in Nahlaot, walked through the deserted courtyards of the haredi Batei Broyde neighborhood on Tuesday with a reporter from *The Jerusalem Post*. She talked about the devastating effect the pedophiles have had on Nahlaot, both the haredi area of Batei Broyde and the mixed area, where she lives.

“This is like a little shtetl in downtown Jerusalem,” she said. “These are the holiest, kindest, best people, people who have devoted their lives to Torah. All of a sudden, it’s like they go from that to being the epicenter of the largest pedophile ring in Israel’s history.

“These people aren’t lawyers, they’re not politicians, and they’re in a situation that’s so much bigger than anything they can handle.”

The long rows of apartments in Batei Broyde were built more than 100 years ago, and the area is one of the original neighborhoods built outside of the Old City. Thousands of tourists pass through the courtyard each year to see the neighborhood’s Old World charm and picturesque stone archways in the middle of the downtown Jerusalem bustle.

“If you go house by house, almost every family was affected,” said Rivka.

A haredi mother from Batei Broyde who asked to remain anonymous said six families have left the neighborhood due to the abuse scandal. In a neighborhood where each family has seven to 14 kids, the decisions to leave have left large holes in the community, she said.

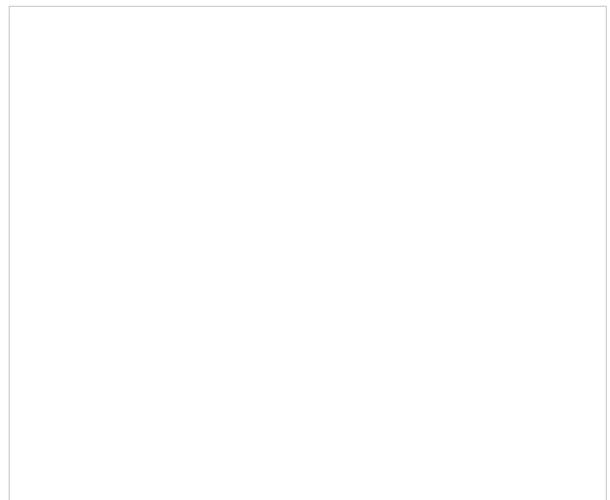
In one family that left, out of 10 children, every single child was abused.

“They would recruit and threaten babysitters, ones who had been molested for years,” explained Rivka.

“They would tell them ‘if you don’t bring the toddlers that you’re babysitting for, we know where your bedroom is and we know where your parents are and we’ll come and kill you.’”

Rivka said that the man she believes is at the head of the pedophile ring, S, recruited some older men who had mental challenges or were considered “a little off” by the community. These men were considered largely harmless, and were even invited to meals by the parents of the children they abused.

She said S used these men to threaten kids on their way home from school, forcing the children to go to apartments where the pedophiles had access. Some of the suspects were able to make copies of keys, and memorized the schedules of the parents to know when apartments were empty.



In July 2011, the community went to the police and began making complaints. Almost immediately, the police understood they were dealing with one of the largest pedophile abuse scandals in the country's history.

Today, there are more than 80 children who have made official complaints, but they have named at least 110 children who were affected.

Six men were arrested over the course of the summer, but police were only able to gather enough evidence to indict three of them, Binyamin Satz, Bentzion Primishelanu and Zalman Cohen. The three men will remain incarcerated until the end of the legal proceedings against them.

The other three, including S, considered by the neighborhood residents to be the mastermind of the pedophile ring, were incarcerated for a number of weeks and then released due to lack of evidence.

On January 8, an additional three suspects were arrested. One was committed to a psychiatric hospital, and the remaining two were given a restraining order and forced to leave Jerusalem for two months. A 10th man who police were investigating was found dead in his apartment at the end of December. Police classified his death as a suicide. Rivka explained that his apartment was where children allegedly went to watch movies the pedophiles had made of them.

The Committee for the Rights of the Child, headed by MK Zevulun Orlev (Habayit Hayehudi), toured Nahlaot on Thursday in a show of solidarity with the neighborhood.

The committee also held a special meeting examining the pedophile scandal two weeks ago at the initiative of Uri Maklev (United Torah Judaism), who said the residents turned to him after they felt the police investigation was not making progress.

"The past is what the police are investigating," Maklev said on Thursday in a statement released by the committee. "We are interested in the present – that the reality of everyday life returns to the routine."

Now that the years of secrecy have been broken, the community wants to begin to heal. But what is most terrifying for the children and their parents is that at least three of the pedophiles are still at large in the neighborhood, threatening families who have already suffered abuse.

Police have stressed the difficulties of testimony from children. A concerned parent who asks their child if a certain person hurt them has immediately tainted the investigation, and may have rendered the child's testimony inadmissible in court. Similarly, a parent who promises their child a candy bar after three hours of grueling testimony with a police investigator is considered to have offered their child a bribe, and thus disqualified their testimony.

"The State Attorney's Office said that the parents destroyed the investigation," said Jerusalem police spokesman Shmuel Ben- Ruby, who added that the families only came to the police after they had done their own informal investigation.

"This is the price the parents and kids are paying, this is the price of silence," said Ben- Ruby. "It hurts me for these poor children, that they suffered this for years because of parents that preferred to keep it quiet, sweep it under the rug, go to the rabbis and take care of it themselves."

But parents complained that the police never gave them this information, and never told them to stop talking to their children or how to approach the issue.

“It’s the job of the police to protect the community,” said Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz, a community leader in Nahlaot.

“Maybe it could have been better, but now you’re getting full cooperation. Trying to blame the community is a disrespect to a community that’s been hit hard.

“It’s like what MK Uri Maklev said [at the committee meeting two weeks ago]: It’s not that the haredi families didn’t know this was going on, they didn’t know things like this could go on.”

Not only are the pedophiles still walking around the neighborhood, but they’re threatening the families who complained. One of the pedophiles threatened to kill Rivka while she was with her children last week. Others who are leading the fight in the public sphere through blogs and the media have also been threatened.

“This is the biggest sex offender in Israel’s history. He masterminded the systematic rape of over 100 kids, and he’s just sitting there. Can you imagine how terrifying this is?” asked Rivka.

The social services have been struggling to provide therapy for more than 100 kids of destitute families. Many families were barely making enough money to survive before the abuse, but now, they are faced with therapy for five or six kids at a cost of more than NIS 1,000 per week.

“The kids are under house arrest, instead of the people who should be under house arrest,” said Rivka, gesturing to the empty courtyards. “People are raising 10 kids in two rooms, and the kids are not allowed outside, ever.”

“This was so devastating for us, we were so depressed when it first came out,” said Rivka. “It was really a mourning process for a neighborhood we loved, and an illusion of purity and goodness. We thought to raise our kids in this beautiful village in the city, but it’s like someone has poured a bucket of ice cold water over us.”

But there are rays of hope in the community’s struggles. Sara Mannheim, an art teacher in Nahlaot, is trying to provide art therapy for some of the haredi women in the neighborhood. She is currently overseeing a large mural of the Seven Species, which six mothers work on at a time.

“The premise of the Seven Species is that this is the most treasured thing, and the most treasured thing to us is our children,” said Mannheim. The first thing to be completed on the mural was the sky overlooking a rebuilt Jerusalem. “The sky is filled with light and hope for the future, because that’s the message,” she explained.

Mannheim is also trying to organize activities for the children – art therapy, psychodrama, drumming, swimming – something none of the parents in the neighborhood can afford, but which can help the children reclaim their self-confidence and independence. She’s also working on two-day trip to the north and a psychodrama for the mothers.

“Parents know they have to be strong for their kids,” she said. “We have to hope, everyone says this will scar them for life... but we need to hope. This is the culture of the Jews, hope.”

The community of Nahlaot is currently working to set up a legal defense fund and raise money for activities for the children.

*For inquiries into ways to support, please contact [nahlaotheals@gmail.com](mailto:nahlaotheals@gmail.com).*