

Safed rabbi convicted of rape for 'sex therapy'

Ezra Sheinberg, ex-yeshiva head, confesses to using his position as a spiritual leader to take advantage of eight women

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A well-known rabbi and yeshiva head from Safed was convicted on Wednesday of committing sexual crimes against eight women.

Rabbi Ezra Sheinberg confessed and was convicted in Nazareth District Court as part of a plea deal over a series of crimes committed against women who came to him for advice and counseling.

The prosecution demanded that the former head of the Orot HaAri yeshiva receive a nine-year jail sentence after his conviction for crimes, including rape and indecent assault.

A total of 14 women made allegations against Sheinberg to a special investigation team and police suspect that many other victims were afraid to come forward. The victims were all religious women who had come to the rabbi for advice or help on various issues including health.

Sheinberg had been a popular Kabbalist and respected figure in Israel's national-religious community and author of several books of Torah ideas.

Sheinberg was arrested on July 1, 2015, as he attempted to flee the country as allegations against him emerged. He has been in prison since that time.

According to [prosecutors at the time](#), Sheinberg used his position of prominence and reputation as a powerful mystic to lure in and take advantage of women who came to him for religious counsel and blessings for fertility when they struggled to conceive.

They alleged that the victims shared a number of characteristics: they were young religious women whose husbands, in most cases, were Sheinberg's students at the seminary.

Part of his modus operandi involved convincing the victims that only he could provide a solution to their problems, through a treatment he dubbed "relaxation."

During those sessions, Sheinberg fraudulently obtained his victims' consent to commit sexual acts, prosecutors said, adding that the defendant used innocent young women who trusted him as a tool to satisfy his sexual desires.

Some of the women had originally approached a rabbinic council with the allegations. A team of local rabbis, led by Safed Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, began investigating the accusations in mid-June 2015, and later reported them to the police.

Sheinberg's wife told Eliyahu that she knew her husband had sex with the women, but that the sex was part of their therapy.

Sheinberg has eight children and several grandchildren.

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