

Police to look into threats said to be made in yeshiva abuse case

By Nina Pinto Goel

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The police investigation into allegations of sexual abuse at the Merkaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem has branched out to include complaints of threats leveled against four students who claim to be victims.

Jerusalem police have interrogated eight former students of the yeshiva. The yeshiva is suspected of attempting to dissuade the alleged victims of the suspect Ze'ev Sultanovitch from filing a complaint with the authorities.

Among the threats made against two of the men, both in their twenties, was that their future income would be damaged by the affair because they would not find good marriage matches.

The other two men who said they were victims of the rabbi's abuse are married with children.

The police is currently investigating the terms of Sultanovitch's employment at Merkaz Harav.

According to yeshiva officials, Sultanovitch is not an employee, and therefore they are not legally obliged to provide answers on any issue.

Police investigators expressed surprise at the notion that Sultanovitch taught at the yeshiva for a decade without payment.

In the coming days, the police intends to collect more testimonies from students and staff of a yeshiva in Gush Etzion where Sultanovitch taught.

The yeshiva decided to end Sultanovitch's tenure there, apparently in response to the news from Merkaz Harav.

Sultanovitch's attorney, Yair Golan, said that elements external to the yeshiva worked against his client.

Merkaz Harav students had difficulty understanding how men in their twenties would allow someone to sexually abuse them.

To the police investigators, however, they noted that the respect that students had for Sultanovitch caused them to give him little opposition, and their embarrassment over the situation prevented them from defending themselves.

The police will continue collecting testimonies from Merkaz Harav staff, in order to gather enough evidence for an arrest warrant against Sultanovitch.