

Horrible testimonies seek to lift shroud of silence around ritual sex abuse claims

Survivors tell Knesset lawmakers of organized assaults on children by those claiming mantle of religion, alleging longstanding phenomenon made worse by official indifference

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Illustrative image. (Bonciutoma/Istock by Getty Images)

Police have opened an investigation into multiple allegations of organized ritual sexual abuse after accusers relayed harrowing testimony of torture, rape and other horrors to lawmakers late last month.

The July 27 hearing included testimony from alleged victims, now adults, regarding abuse they had experienced as children, primarily in the ultra-Orthodox and national-religious communities in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Haifa, Safed and elsewhere.

Accusers recounted tales of gruesome sexual abuse they experienced as children, usually by groups of people, involving ritualistic, religious rhetoric and iconography. The abuse took place in schools, synagogues, private homes, warehouses, cemeteries and forests, they alleged.

The testimony left MKs from the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality and the Special Committee on Youth Affairs visibly shaken, several in tears.

Several women alleged that religious and community leaders had participated in the abuse. One woman named Yael Ariel testified that she had heard accounts from several women alleging that “doctors, educators, police officers, and both former and current Knesset members” took part.

Others who recounted their experiences requested anonymity to speak openly about the ghastly tortures they underwent.

“I was around 15, tied to a torture bed in basements in the Tel Aviv area,” said one woman, recalling an incident in which her abusers — including family members — slaughtered a snake, mixed its blood with hers and drank it, while raping her and calling her a “holy vessel.”



A Knesset committee meeting on ritual sexual abuse on July 27, 2025. (Noam Moskowitz/Knesset spokesperson)

“They tied me up in every possible way, using whips and electric shocks, raping me,” said another survivor, who testified that she was 5 years old when she began suffering “unbearable abuse,” including by religious leaders and educators who told her that she was “defective” and needed to be “fixed.”

Another accuser said that her father and others abused and trafficked her as a child in “sadistic networks involving rituals,” allegedly including well-known figures, including politicians.

Several victims noted that many of the incidents were filmed on cameras or phones.

“It’s hard to explain what happens there,” she said. “There are children, cameras, blood, and death.”

Little understood by cops

A focus of the two hearings, and an earlier meeting in June on the same subject, was the alleged failure to protect children. Accusers charged that authorities, including educators, social workers, and police, were alerted to crimes being committed but took no action.

Prosecutors are accused of having dismissed cases as not worth their time, and, in some instances, community leaders themselves are alleged to have taken part in the abuse.

“The police received material about this a year ago, and said they would investigate, but they didn’t,” said Orit Sulitzeanu, the executive director of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, who has been working with victims of organized ritual sexual abuse for over a year to bring their claims to light.

“There are many problems in the Israel Police. Complaints often aren’t followed up on. Cases are closed quickly. As a result, victims feel like there’s no point in going to the police,” she said.

In response to an inquiry from The Times of Israel, the police said: “Every complaint received by the police is examined in depth and professionally, and investigators work as necessary to examine possible connections between similar cases, in accordance with the findings that emerge as part of the investigation.”

They confirmed that “the issue” is under investigation, but would not provide any further details.

A police representative at the July 27 hearing said the department was reviewing closed cases going back over a decade.

Much about the organized ritual sexual abuse is murky, including how widespread the alleged phenomenon is. Critics say police lack a serious understanding of the issue as a whole.



MK Pnina Tamano-Shata attends a press conference at the Knesset in Jerusalem, July 29, 2025. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

“When we asked police how many complaints had been received related to this phenomenon, they told us they didn’t know,” said a Knesset source with direct knowledge. “The police representative openly admitted they had no idea how to identify or distinguish ritual sexual abuse cases from others.”

There is evidence that ritual sexual abuse taking place is being carried out in a systematic, organized way, and therefore is not something that police can tackle on a case-by-case basis, the Knesset source said.

“This isn’t just a series of individual cases of sexual assault,” they said. “It needs to be treated like organized crime. Like with the mafia or any other criminal network, you have to connect the dots.”

While international law enforcement bodies such as Interpol have extensive experience identifying the patterns of organized ritual sexual abuse, it is less known in Israel, the source said.

Following the first hearing in June, police told lawmakers that they opened an investigation into the incidents under Lahav 105, the cybercrime and child exploitation unit, which many MKs have said isn’t sufficient.

“There must be a first-of-its-kind meeting between the Prosecutor’s Office and the police on ritual abuse,” National Unity MK Pnina Tamano-Shata, who chairs the Committee for the Status of Women and Gender Equality, said at the hearing. “Lahav 105 isn’t the body that should investigate this kind of incident.”



MK Naama Lazimi attends a Knesset Finance Committee meeting on July 14, 2025. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

“If you don’t identify the ritualistic element, it’s doomed to fail,” noted MK Naama Lazimi, who heads the Special Committee on Youth Affairs. She called for deep probes into criminal enterprise, profiteering, and human trafficking elements of the alleged abuse.

Tamano-Shata told The Times of Israel that she had requested that the Israel Police meet with the State Prosecutor’s Office and other relevant agencies “to understand the scale of the phenomenon, where it exists, and then come up with some kind of action plan — even a preliminary one.”

Tamano-Shata also told the state prosecutor’s representative that legislation needed to be introduced regarding cults.

“It’s clear to me that in Israel, cults are not dealt with the way they should be,” she said. “Many ritual abuses occur within cults; children are abused and then smuggled abroad.”

Both Tamano-Shata and Lazimi noted the irony of discussing sexual abuse at a time when Likud MK Hanoch Milwidsky had just been appointed to head the powerful Knesset Finance Committee despite being under a police investigation for rape.

Milwidsky is a close follower of Michael Laitman, who has been accused of rape and is the head of the Bnei Baruch kabbalistic cult, which has been accused by former members of sexual exploitation.

“We have received testimonies about organized ritual abuse and are demanding answers — sometimes forcefully — because we are driven by a sense of mission and purpose,” said Tamano-Shata. “I sent a letter to the Knesset speaker stating that MK Hanoch Milwidsky, who is in the midst of major investigations and serious allegations — though the presumption of innocence applies — should not be appointed to such a powerful position while under investigation for such grave offenses, including sexual offenses and extortion.”



Likud MK Hanoch Milwidsky (right) is seen leaving the Lahav 433 police unit headquarters in Lod on July 25, 2025, alongside his attorney. (Roy Alima/Flash90)

“It cannot be that this place ignores such a serious phenomenon,” Lazimi said of Milwidsky’s appointment during the hearing. “The chair of the Finance Committee cannot be a suspect in such extreme cases.”

A second lawmaker, Avraham Bezalel, recently resigned from the Knesset, following what a Haaretz report described as “allegations of inappropriate acts.”

National broadcaster Kan reported that a young Haredi man alleged that Bezalel had harmed him.

Another case remains shrouded in secrecy. In April, allegations of sexual abuse were made against a government minister by the minister’s daughter. The case is under one of the most sweeping gag orders in recent memory, and the press is barred from naming those involved or reporting on the details of the investigation, though the allegations were made public on social media and details of the case can be found on the minister’s Wikipedia page.

Sulitzeanu noted that allegations are often leveled against people in positions of power who can use their influence to silence claims against them.

“These are group assaults involving multiple perpetrators, including rabbis. In some cases, the parents knew. There is, in many cases, also child trafficking,” she said.

Tamano-Shata noted that women who attended the first hearing on the subject in June had been afraid to testify again or file charges.

“We’ve asked the police to protect women who come forward, because they’re afraid. If there is no formal complaint made, there’s no way to handle it,” she said.

Code of silence

Though all of those who testified at the hearings were decades removed from the alleged abuse, they expressed fears that the practices were continuing to take place.

In 2019, Rotem Aloni, a lawyer who represents victims of sexual assault, was contacted by several families with disturbing stories of their children being subjected to “highly organized” sexual abuse, involving groups rather than lone perpetrators, and often carried out as part of religious rituals with religious symbols.

“They were from different parts of the country and didn’t know each other, but had such similar stories,” Aloni said.



Daily life in the Haredi neighborhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem, on December 19, 2024. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

Like the alleged crimes recounted in the Knesset hearings, the abuse Aloni heard about was concentrated within the ultra-Orthodox community and often took place within educational institutions or through systems meant to protect children, such as school transportation.

She alleged a wide conspiracy involving school staff, drivers, or others embedded in the system. “The schools were completely infiltrated,” she said.

Sulitzeanu said ultra-Orthodox communities seemed particularly susceptible to harboring such brutal maltreatment, with the wide authority granted rabbis and community leaders easily abused and a insular bonds creating a strong code of silence and distrust of the outside.

“When there’s a perpetrator among them, they prefer to silence the victim and deny what’s happening,” Sulitzeanu said. “All it takes is one evil person who, under the guise of a rabbi, gains people’s trust.”

Aloni noted that alleged abuse of this kind would require the type of insular community that could foster a network of people willing to cooperate and keep quiet.

“I think everyone knew what was going on, or at least held suspicions,” Aloni added. “There were basic steps that could have reduced the risk to children, but they weren’t taken.”



Orit Sulitzeanu, executive director of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel. (Sharon Gabai)

Aloni wound up representing about 20 victims in the case she put together in 2019, but says that she knew of “hundreds” of other victims at the time.

All of the cases she filed were shut by the state prosecution by 2022, citing a lack of evidence.

Even though, in many cases, the incidents were filmed or recorded, connecting what evidence police could uncover to individual children and incidents remained a huge challenge, especially since the only witnesses were often traumatized children scared into silence.



Illustrative: The police station in Maale Adumim (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

“Consider how much energy was put into getting these children not to talk about this,” she said. “They threatened them, they scared them to death. On top of that, it’s incredibly difficult for anyone — let alone a small child — to talk about such trauma with a stranger.”

The sheer number of alleged victims describing similar incidents, despite not knowing each other and being from different parts of the country, should have merited a coordinated investigation, but neither police nor prosecutors approached the cases with seriousness, Aloni said.

She recalled an incident in which officers went to a residence described by multiple victims, but left when no one answered.

“I told them to get a warrant, but they did nothing,” Aloni said.

The lawyer mostly attributes the state’s apathy to a combination of incompetence, bureaucratic inertia, overburdened investigators, and prosecutors who dismissed the allegations as parental hysteria.

A spokesperson for the state prosecutor’s office acknowledged receipt of the Times of Israel’s request for details of the cases in question but couldn’t verify or disclose the information.

“I think they didn’t believe it,” Aloni said. “They thought that the parents made it up and were hysterical. But 10, 20 cases — that’s not worth at least looking into?”