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Friday, 20 Apr 2007

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Women lay sex abuse claims against Brethren member

NZPA | Friday, 20 April 2007

UPDATED REPORT: Nelson police are investigating complaints from three former Exclusive Brethren women alledging they were sexually abused by a reportedly senior member of the secret religious sect when they were children.

A police spokeswoman said today the complaints involved allegations of child molestation over four decades.

The offending is alleged to have taken place between the early 1950s and early 1980s.

The spokeswoman said police had not yet spoken to the man and were unsure if he was a current or former member of the Exclusive Brethren.

The spokeswoman said the investigation was in its early stages and it could be some time before police decided if charges would be laid.

A fourth woman is understood to be making a complaint against the man in Auckland.

Television One News alleged last night the church's Australia-based spokesman, Tony McCorkell, currently in New Zealand, was investigating the claims – although he denied that when interviewed by the channel yesterday. Asked what the church was doing about the sexual abuse allegations, he replied: "I'm not aware of that. If you have evidence of that I'd be glad to see it."

Mr McCorkell said the church would never try to cover up such allegations.

But TV One said two of the women, former members of the sect, had told church leaders about the abuse at the time it happened and were ignored.

One woman, who was not identified, said she believed there had been "multiple offenders".

"If I went and asked them now they would try and deny it because in there it's a huge guilt and fear thing," she said.

"A lot of people who perhaps have been involved in that sort of thing would not go outside the church for help."

TV One reported that the complainants believed children could have been molested as recently as last year.

It said the women had not known of each other's cases until recently, and came forward following previous reports of sexual abuse.

The network said the women – aged between the early 20s and 61 – claimed they were abused by the man when they were aged between five and 10.

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