

I am a citizen of the United States. I was a member of Jehovah's Witnesses for approximately 35 years and was baptized into the religion at the age of 13 years old.

My experience was one of one trauma right after the other. An abusive father who served as an elder. Another elder, having the title then known as Presiding Overseer in our local congregation. He sexually abused me and others from the age of 7 to 13. Following the tapering off of abuse, I developed what the elders deemed "behavioral issues". These included seeing "worldly people" (those not within the organization). I also dated boys that were not Jehovah's Witnesses. Since that was against the rules, I was eventually disfellowshipped from the organization when elders (including the one who had abused me), deemed me not sufficiently repentant. I was immediately cut off from all friends and loved ones, without a word. My family, congregation and friends were told not to speak to me even on the street. I was told to get my acquaintances and family back, I would need to go through the humiliating experience of attending their meetings in the Kingdom Hall, sitting on the back row and not attempting to interact with anyone or speak to anyone for a period of 6-12 months. I did so. I only went through the process in order to get my mother back into my life. I knew no one else and missed my family so much.

The consequences of being disfellowshipped affected my mental balance, my health and my day to day functioning in life. When you are raised to have no association outside of an organization, when they cast you out in a shunning situation, life seems dark and hopeless. I'm aware a religion can choose its members and its rules. However, training families to participate in shunning ones who they claim to love in order to manipulate their behaviors, causes lasting damage. Jehovah's Witnesses hold all the cards in a situation like that, as it forces persons to be desperate, in many instances, to scramble to get back into favor with the organization in order to get their friends and families back. They manipulate the minds of young and old alike and attempt to do so at people's doors in their ministry activities. In my view, while respecting religion's rights to exist, I believe they are harmful, detrimental and devious in their efforts to control people they are able to lure in.

Before being disfellowshipped, there is a “judicial process” that involves being interviewed regarding perceived or rumored bad behaviors that they deem to be disfellowshipping offenses. They assign a group of 3 elders to “handle” your case. Disfellowshipping cases are things such as smoking, immoral behaviors, lying etc. There is a long list. The three elders meet with you with the intent of determining if you are worth working with or if you are repentant to the degree that they would wish you to stay in the congregation. They ask extremely personal questions. For instance, if it is rumored you had sex with someone you aren’t married to, they will ask if you had an orgasm and how many. The mental anguish resulting from judicial meetings and the disfellowshipping cannot be overstated.

