

TLC Pulls '19 Kids and Counting' After Molestation Reports

U.S. cable network TLC said Friday it has pulled all episodes of *19 Kids and Counting*, its top-rated television reality show featuring a large Christian family, after reports surfaced that the eldest son had molested underage girls as a teen.

Josh Duggar, 27, the son, issued an apology Thursday, acknowledging "wrongdoing," but did not directly address allegations reported by *In Touch* magazine and other websites.

"We are deeply saddened and troubled by this heartbreaking situation, and our thoughts and prayers are with the family and victims at this difficult time," TLC said in a statement.

TLC, which is owned by Discovery Communications, did not say if it was planning to cancel the show. The program, which has been on the air since 2008 and concluded its 10th season this month, is not currently in production.

The show chronicles the struggles and triumphs of the conservative family of Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, in Arkansas.

Josh Duggar issued a statement Thursday saying he felt remorse.

"Twelve years ago, as a young teenager, I acted inexcusably for which I am extremely sorry and deeply regret. I hurt others, including my family and close friends," he said in the statement, posted on the Duggar Family Facebook page.

Duggar also resigned from his job at the Family Research Council, a Christian lobbying group based in Washington, D.C.

The apology came after *In Touch* published a document it said it obtained from Arkansas' Springdale Police Department alleging multiple instances in which Duggar molested underage girls.

The police department on Friday told Reuters that Duggar had never been arrested on the allegations and that it had received a court order Thursday to destroy all copies of the document to protect an alleged victim.

The Duggars received support Friday from an influential conservative voice, former Arkansas Governor and presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.

"Josh's actions when he was an underage teen are as he described them himself, 'inexcusable,' but that doesn't mean 'unforgivable,'" Huckabee said on his Facebook page. "He and his family dealt with it and were honest and open about it with the victims and the authorities."

The Duggar family, whose TV success has made them staples of celebrity magazines, did not respond to requests for comment after TLC pulled the show's episodes.

(Writing by Mary Milliken; editing by Steve Orlofsky and Leslie Adler)