



Best Article - News

ISLAND RAPE VICTIMS FORCED TO ENDURE SECOND HELL DUE TO LACK OF LOCAL FORENSIC FACILITIES

Annie Brown

Daily Record

23 January 2017

Rape victims from Scotland's northern islands are forced to travel unwashed and hungry to the mainland for forensic examinations.

Victims on Orkney and Shetland are taken with a police escort on a passenger flight or ferry to Aberdeen, because there are no forensic facilities on their islands.

Police urge rape survivors not to wash, drink or eat before they have an examination as vital trace evidence can easily be lost.

And the added ordeal of having to make such a traumatic journey means island victims are even more fearful of reporting sex attacks, experts say.

They also run the risk of losing their anonymity if locals on the plane or ferry recognise them and their police escort.

Rape Crisis Scotland's national coordinator Sandy Brindley says victims on the islands are being betrayed in a "postcode lottery".

She explained: "The first thing people want to do after being raped is wash. The length of delay of having to travel without being able to wash adds to their trauma. The situation is unacceptable."

Police previously bought in NHS services to gather DNA evidence but individual health boards took over in 2014 and Sandy says there is now no collective national approach, despite an SNP promise to improve forensics.

She added: "There is no strategic leadership to make sure this works across all areas. There is no proper planning across the country.

"The Scottish Government need to be demonstrating leadership across the country in terms of improving services so it is not a postcode lottery or reliant on individual goodwill."

The Western Isles do have forensic facilities because a local female doctor agreed to take on the responsibility.

Sandy said: "When women have been raped, the very least we should be able to offer them is sensitive services that are appropriate without having to travel to the mainland.

"If there aren't doctors locally, why isn't someone travelling to the islands rather than the woman being the one to travel?"

The timescale for forensic evidence is generally within seven days of a sex attack but the sooner an examination is done, the better.

The shocking gap in provision has been highlighted by new rape crisis centres set up in the last year in Orkney and Shetland.

In 2014-15, there were 12 sexual assaults recorded in Shetland including three rapes. In the same time, there were 44 reports of sexual crimes in Orkney, including 10 rapes, two attempted rapes and eight sexual assaults.

As only one in five attacks are reported, there could be the equivalent of one sexual assault a week in Orkney alone.

Zelda Bradley established Orkney Rape Crisis one year ago while psychotherapist Linda Gray set up Shetland Rape Crisis last May.

The women have joined forces to push for local forensic facilities.

Zelda said: "Can you imagine having to make that flight to Aberdeen in the aftermath of a violent assault, accompanied by known professionals?"

"To undergo examination, reporting and possible treatment and be away from home for 24 hours plus? I know everyone would like to see some improvements to this re-traumatising aspect of reporting."

In areas such as Glasgow, women can have forensics gathered in specialist centres such as Archway before they decide to make a complaint to the police. But on the islands, there is no such choice.

MSP Tavish Scott has written to NHS Shetland to ask for a solution to the lack of appropriate forensic facilities and raised the concern that travelling to Aberdeen for examinations could lead to contamination of evidence.

He said: "We want to make it as easy as possible to have a successful prosecution in a potential rape trial and having a forensic facility on the islands is important.

"The reality of having to get on the plane down to Aberdeen in the most horrible of circumstances must be a barrier to anyone thinking of reporting a sexual assault."

Linda has counselled women who have not reported assaults because they didn't want to travel to the mainland and she is aware that children have had to make the journey.

She said: "The numbers of rapes look lower than they are and the message that gives to the perpetrator is that they are more than likely going to get away with an attack."

The detection rate on the island is high but Linda believes that more needs to be done to break the cycle of assault.

She says it has always been difficult for victims to come forward in small island communities, explaining: "Rape is very taboo here. People struggle to even say the word."

The lack of understanding of the challenges of winning a successful prosecution means women are deemed liars if a case is not prosecuted.

On the islands, victims can often be related to the perpetrator or have links to the family, so they are fearful of the fallout and they are also highly likely to bump into the perpetrator.

Linda, like Zelda, works 28 hours a week and the new service has brought a positive response from victims, some of whom have waited decades to share their stories. She has seen 22 clients aged 15-70 since May, three of whom were men.

She said: "There are many more current cases than I expected. I think the survivors I have seen are the tip of the iceberg."

Linda believes there is a higher tolerance of sexual violence on the islands.

"There is almost a normalisation and we need to challenge what people think is acceptable behaviour.

"For example, being groped in the pub is not acceptable."

Linda is also concerned about the problem of "sexting" – sending explicit images via text, email, messaging or social media – that is spreading through island schools.

She said: "It is happening on a large scale. We have to let teenagers know that if they have pictures of underage teenagers in their phone, they are in possession of child pornography and they are breaking the law."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said last night: "Rape has a devastating and long-term impact on victims and we are committed to tackling this heinous crime and supporting victims to feel confident that they will be supported and treated with sensitivity when reporting a crime.

"We are taking bold steps to improve the way the justice system responds to sexual crimes and have committed to reviewing the way forensic examinations are undertaken to ensure they are done sensitively and appropriately.

"We have provided an additional £1.85million for Rape Crisis Scotland to enhance awareness and the specialist support available for survivors of sexual violence. This has meant that Rape Crisis have been able to establish a service in Orkney and Shetland.

"We have also committed resources to NHS Scotland to look at forensic examination services across the country and tell us where improvements and change are required. "This will of course include how services will operate for rural and remote locations such as Orkney and Shetland."

"YEARS OF MY LIFE STOLEN BECAUSE OF ABUSE" WOMAN SPEAKS OF ABUSE HELL

Sandra Dick

Edinburgh Evening News

2 September 2016

Nicola Borthwick tells Sandra Dick about the years of emotional and mental abuse she suffered and how a call to Scottish Women's Aid changed her life.

It had been a good night. A concert, on to a club and some laughs with friends.

As her partner pulled her to his side to whisper gently in her ear, Nicola Borthwick thought it was to pay her a compliment, say something nice, maybe share a romantic moment.

The sharp jab in her ribs suggested something different.

“He said ‘I could put a knife in you’ right there,” recalls Nicola. “We had been having fun, we were with friends. It was completely out of the blue.

“I didn’t know what was going on. I told myself he’d had a difficult past, he had anger issues

It was early in the relationship, but with that jab in the ribs, the die was cast. There would be no black eyes, no obvious bruises, no scars and no broken bones, yet Nicola would go on to be emotionally and mentally battered by her partner’s abuse for years.

There were the times she recalls being scared to pick up the phone in case she didn’t say ‘hello’ in a tone of voice that suited him.

Inexplicable rages that would erupt for no reason, and constant put-downs and criticisms were commonplace.

“I was a fat bitch, I didn’t do things properly, I ate too much, I was criticised for the way I breathe, he’d shout and kick the walls,” she recalls.

“I had to breastfeed my son in the dark, he’d kick me out of bed when my son was feeding, saying it was too noisy. I had to sleep downstairs on the sofa bed so I didn’t disturb him.

“Next day he’d be like a ray of sunshine. You start to feel you’re going insane. It was the two extremes, it was frightening.”

Smart, with a strong Christian faith and a good support network of family and friends, she might seem an unlikely victim of abuse. Yet she claims it was so insidious that even she struggled to figure out just what was going on.

It took a call to Scottish Women’s Aid in the days after she finally fled in fear, to help her realise exactly what had been happening.

“People who are abused have black eyes, broken bones. They didn’t look like me,” she says.

“But that call switched on a light. The woman I spoke to completely understood what had been going on in my life. I remember thinking ‘you must know him’, no-one else understood like this.”

Nicola, 41, now lives in Colinton Mains, is studying English literature at university and rebuilding her life after five years of abuse. Chillingly, she now realises that her experience is far from unique.

There were 59,882 domestic abuse incidents reported in Scotland in 2014-15, compared with 58,439 in 2013-14 – an increase of 2.5 per cent.

While some undoubtedly involved physical assaults, others are likely to have involved persistent dominating behaviour, undermining and controlling, whittling away at the victim’s self-esteem, threatening them and manipulating them.

Now Nicola is appealing for other women experiencing abuse at the hands of a partner to contact the new National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage 24-hour helpline, operated by Scottish Women's Aid.

It offers crisis support, referrals to agencies that can help, emotional support, as well as guidance with housing, safety planning and benefits. It's also there to support professionals, family members, colleagues and friends concerned about someone they know.

Nicola contacted Scottish Women's Aid after taking a "split second, instant" decision to leave her home outside Glasgow.

"Quite often with abusers, it's not terribly physical, the abuse is so ambiguous and subtle, it's something that grows and they build on it. But at that moment I felt it was clear something else could happen. My son was four years old, and I was scared for him. I left my home where my family and friends were close by, all my possessions, everything I had, and fled."

Talking to a Scottish Women's Aid counsellor put everything into perspective.

"The words she spoke, I could cry just thinking of them," says Nicola. "Everything slotted together. You get to the brink of losing it. I went from being adored to being called a fat bitch. If he called and I said 'hi' the wrong way, he'd say 'how dare you answer the phone like that to me?'."

"I wasn't allowed to spend money. He had complete control of the finances. One day I took my son to Largs for a day out on the ferry. It cost £4 for a ticket. He went bananas, swearing and shouting at me. He was a high earner, it wasn't about money, it was about control. It drives a person mad. I thought I was the only person these things happened to."

Even after she fled, the stress continued when her ex discovered where she was. "Abusers don't like to let go," she adds. "He was arrested several times but it's hard to prosecute someone for being a bully."

"Now we're protected by a court order but we still live with that fear. I can't give my son the freedom other children have because there's always that fear."

"Thankfully Women's Aid has been there throughout – it's an incredible service."

She's now in a new, loving relationship. And while the abuse has ended, it has had a lasting impact.

"I don't know if it will be the same again," she says. "I'm not as relaxed as I would have been before I met my abuser. And I don't know if I will ever regain that sense of peace."

Nicola now hopes to put her experiences to positive use, helping others.

"It's important to change people's minds about what domestic abuse is, and educate men not to be abusers," she adds.

"It feels like I lost years – they were stolen from my life. I'll never get them back. One of the most healing things of all, has been to speak about it."

Help at any time of day or night

SCOTTISH Women's Aid helps thousands of women every year who are at risk or experiencing domestic abuse or forced marriage.

Domestic abuse is persistent and controlling behaviour by a partner or ex-partner which causes physical, sexual and/or emotional harm. It often gets worse over time.

It isn't always the result of a fight or argument – in some cases it can take the form of withholding money and finances, monitoring women and children's movements, restricting what they wear, who they see, where they go and what they say, on and offline. And it cuts across class, ethnic and social boundaries.

The new helpline is designed to provide immediate support and advice – any time of day or night.

Dr Marsha Scott, pictured, chief executive of Scottish Women's Aid, said: "We have assembled a skilled and specially trained staff team made up of the most incredibly warm and welcoming women as well as a new phone system that connects male callers directly to a specialist service designed just for men.

"With the support of the Scottish Government and partners across Scotland, we plan to end domestic abuse and forced marriage; in the meantime, those in need of help can be assured that our new helpline is there for them when they need it."

The new 24/7 helpline can be contacted on **0800 027 1234** or e-mail **helpline@ndafms.org.uk**. For more information, visit **www.ndafmhs.org.uk**.

US DITCHES CONTROVERSIAL RAPE CLAUSE AND FAMILY CAP WELFARE POLICIES

Judith Duffy

Sunday Herald

7 May 2017

THE Tory Government and Ruth Davidson may be sticking to the 'rape clause' and capping child tax credits but in Donald Trump's heartland in the United States similar welfare policies are being ditched amid concerns about their failure.

In the US the idea of limiting the amount of aid to families who had more children was implemented during an era of welfare reform in the 1990s, stemming largely from a stereotype of the 'welfare queen' – poor mothers supposedly dedicated to milking the system by having more children.

By 2003, 22 states had some form of family cap in place. But since then seven states have repealed these laws and more look set to follow.

The most recent was California, which implemented a U-turn of the maximum family grant earlier this year. State Senator Holly Mitchell, a Democrat who led the repeal, called it "a racist, classist, sexist policy".

Massachusetts had a similar rape clause exemption in place, but the experience there had been that most parents were reluctant to say a child was conceived because of rape.

A campaign to ditch family cap legislation is also gathering momentum in Massachusetts, amid concerns it is increasing child poverty and failing to have any effect on limiting the size of families on welfare.

Critics of the child tax credit family cap in the UK say the experience of the US shows how the policy is based on “crass rhetoric” and “heartless ideology” rather than evidence.

Deborah Harris, a staff attorney at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, a non-profit poverty law and policy centre which is campaigning for the repeal of the family cap, said: “The seven states that have repealed have in general recognised the policy was intended to defer welfare recipients from getting pregnant and having babies, but it doesn’t work – it is a completely failed policy.

“And it is a policy which has severe impacts on the most vulnerable children.”

In the US, the family cap applies to a welfare programme which provides cash benefits to certain families with children for a limited time. In Massachusetts a mother and two children on welfare receives \$578 (around £450) a month. A mother with one child receives \$478 (around £370) a month, but if she has another baby while claiming benefit there is no increase.

In the UK, the family cap is applicable to child tax credits, which can be claimed by families who are both in and out of work. Child benefit will still be paid regardless of family size.

Charities have calculated the family cap (which applies to third and subsequent children born from April this year, unless the mother can prove she was sexually assaulted) could result in a family of three losing £64 a week.

The so-called rape clause provoked a storm of controversy with critics saying it forces victims to endure further trauma.

Last week Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson was criticised for defending it, saying rape victims would only have to “tick a box” to claim additional benefit.

Harris also pointed out the majority of parents who had additional children while on welfare had not intended to become pregnant and in most cases were using some form of birth control.

Emma Ritch, executive director of feminist organisation Engender, said the thinking behind the family cap was “as flawed as it is heartless”.

She continued: “It puts ideology at the centre of the social security system, rather than women and children’s needs.

“It scolds and deprives families who failed to predict that they would one day be facing contraceptive failure, family breakdown, wanting children with a new partner, or bereavement.”

She added: “The UK’s ‘family cap’ is copied and pasted from 1990s US policy that has failed on its own terms. Their policy was built on the myth of the ‘welfare queen’, a racialised caricature in which largely black women were accused of having multiple children to benefit from welfare.

“It did not reduce the number of people dependent on state financial assistance. Instead it deepened the poverty in which women and children were living.”

Alison Thewliss, who was SNP MP for Glasgow Central before the UK Parliament was dissolved for the election, has led the campaign against the family cap and rape clause.

She said: “The Tory plans to limit tax credits to the first two children in a family are based on crass rhetoric rather than evidence.

“US states have already found similar policies to be pushing families deeper into poverty rather than changing reproductive behaviour, and have repealed their restrictions as a result.”

She added: “The rape clause has rightly had a lot of attention in the past few weeks, as the very cruellest and most abhorrent element of a deeply flawed policy. It can't be looked at in isolation though – the judgemental two-child policy speaks to the despicable myth that the least well off in our society breed irresponsibly.

“This is an awful thing for any Government to say. The Tories seem determined to punish people for the circumstances they find themselves in.”

A spokeswoman for the Department of Work and Pensions declined to comment.

HUNDREDS OF SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FOUND AND HELPED IN GLASGOW AS NUMBERS RISE

Hannah Rodger

The Evening Times

15 February 2017

HUNDREDS of victims of sex trafficking have been recovered and helped by Glasgow's dedicated trafficking support service, the Evening Times can reveal.

The Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) has supported more than 200 suspected victims of sexual exploitation who have found their way to the city over the past decade.

Between April 2015 and March 2016, 33 new victims of trafficking were identified and referred to the Glasgow-based service, however staff predict there to be an increase this year.

It comes after we reported on an alleged human trafficking ring which was was busted in Govanhill last week.

Many of the 16 women who were previously recovered by police were supported by TARA. In the most extreme cases women, typically Nigerian, Vietnamese, Albanian and Chinese, have escaped from their abusers not even knowing what country they are in, never mind how to get help.

TARA staff warn the figures are “just the tip of the iceberg”, with an estimated 1300 victims of trafficking and modern slavery thought to be in Scotland at any one time.

The organisation, which is run by Glasgow City Council and funded by the Scottish Government, was initially set up in 2004 to help victims from Glasgow, but due to the surge in demand for help they expanded to cover the whole of Scotland in 2007.

Survivors, who range between 16-years-old and their late 50s, have told of how they were raped, beaten and abused by their traffickers and warned if they fled they would be hunted down and killed, while others have had threats to their families and children back home.

They thought they were moving abroad to start a better life, only to find out they were being forced into prostitution, and sham marriage.

Bronagh Andrew, TARA's coordinator, explained: "Once here, women will be told what's going to happen to them.

"They may refuse and are subject to sexual assaults, physical assaults, they have been raped.

"Women talk about being forced to watch pornography so they know how to behave with the people who are paying for sex."

Bronagh explained one woman she helped had jumped out of a car in Glasgow's city centre in a desperate attempt to escape her abusers.

She had no clue where she was and no idea how to get help.

Bronagh said: "Years ago we had a young woman who escaped from a car in traffic lights and it was a Subway sandwich shop she ran into.

"She thought she was in Toronto.

"If you don't even know what part of the world you're in, you don't have English as your language then taking a step through the door is scary.

"Traffickers may have told you over months that they will find you, they'll kill you, they'll kill your family or you'll be put in jail.

"You don't even know where to tell the police or how to tell them where you've been. It's a real challenge."

MEMBERS of the public are being urged to help spot the signs of trafficking, which are often difficult to detect due to victims being constantly moved around.

In some cases, residents may complain to their local councillors about men ringing their doorbells late at night, or hearing footsteps constantly in a neighbour's home but never seeing anyone leave.

Bronagh said: "These women are hiding in plain sight.

"People are seeing them but they are not identifying them. It's in the traffickers' interest that they are not identified, so we want to improve awareness.

"People don't know what to do.

"Quite often people will think something is a bit off about a situation, but they won't want to call the police and say 'I hear footsteps upstairs but I never see anyone.' or 'I think something gives me the creeps about upstairs.'"

For the women who do manage to escape, the journey to recovery and getting their lives back is a long and painful one, with often complex challenges requiring months or years of work.

They suffer post-traumatic stress, have flashbacks, headaches and unexplained body pains as a result of the weeks, months or sometimes years of abuse they have endured.

OFTEN victims are in their late stages of pregnancy or have complex physical or mental health problems when they come to TARA, having been turfed out of brothels as they would draw too much attention in their condition.

“Women come to us in the late stages of pregnancy and who have had no antenatal care, no treatment at all and no access to services,” said Bronagh.

“We have had women who have had their children taken in to the next room by the traffickers when a punter arrives, and they can hear their child screaming.

“They’re expected to have sex in those conditions. It is used as a tool to keep her under control.”

The long road to recovery is helped by TARA, who typically support victims for 12-18 months once they are referred.

“What we find is that when women get out of that situation, the majority don’t return back into prostitution,” said Bronagh.

“While there’s a lot of stuff they have to get over, they show amazing resilience and strength.

“They want to do what they thought they would be coming here to do.

“Most of them make a claim for asylum and they can fully access services and education here, which they make the most of.”

If you want to report suspicions about trafficking or need help, contact UK Modern Slavery Helpline on **08000 121 700**, Police Scotland on **101**, or call Crimestoppers on **0800 555111**.

PIONEERING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROJECT BACKED BY MOTHER OF STUDENT VICTIM

Caitlin Logan

CommonSpace

15 September 2017

Experience of student whose abuse led to suicide to be used as training model.

STRATHCLYDE University’s Equally Safe in Higher Education (ESHE) project is working closely with the mother of Emily Drouet, an Aberdeen University student who killed herself last year, following physical and emotional abuse from her then boyfriend, Angus Milligan.

The project’s activities this year will include a student and staff survey on gender based violence, training for university staff, and a campus drop-in service for anyone who has experienced rape, sexual assault, violence or harassment.

Emily Drouet’s mother, Fiona (pictured, centre), who first heard about the project from Scottish Women’s Aid, has given it her full support, attending a staff training session this week and granting permission for her daughter’s experience to be used to develop “the Emily Test”.

The test will form a part of specialist training for security staff at the university, which will highlight all of the points in Emily’s experience where staff could have done something differently.

Speaking of her decision to be involved in the project, Fiona Drouet said: “After losing Emily I felt incredibly anxious trying to ascertain what qualified support and awareness there was in universities.

“That’s why, when I discovered ESHE through Scottish Women’s Aid, I got comfort and hope that finally something meaningful was happening to support and protect our young students. Their aim of training all staff to not only recognise the signs of abuse but to be aware of the urgent action that must be taken will really make a difference.

“I believe if the ESHE program had been in place it could have made a huge difference in Emily’s case. I am honoured to be working with this project and fully support ESHE’s work. We can’t bring Emily back, but we hope that by sharing her story other students will not have to suffer as she did.”

ESHE received two years of Scottish Government funding, ending in March 2018. As part of the project, researchers will produce a toolkit for all universities to take forward in addressing and preventing gender based violence on campus.

Drouet said: “We hope that all Scottish universities will take on board ESHE’s advice and expertise and act accordingly to help make universities a safer environment for our children.

“Our children are only 'children' when they start university. They have just left school where they have known a full network of support. They are vulnerable young adults exploring new areas in their lives and are often living away from home without the warmth and support they take for granted.

“They are given personal tutors but it is not always compulsory for them to meet them – certainly Emily had never met hers. There can often be warning signs of students suffering but the question is whether a holistic approach is taken by departments to ensure signs are not missed.”

This is exactly the approach which ESHE hopes to develop, by working with all university staff to raise awareness across the board. The training programmes and drop-in centre for students are being delivered in partnership with Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis Centre.

Anni Donaldson, Knowledge Exchange Fellow at ESHE, explained the thinking behind the project: “Campus sexual violence is something we’ve become more and more aware of, with some high profile cases recently in the US.

“Here in Scotland we are trying to pre-empt this and fulfil universities’ duties as public bodies to work to prevent gender based violence, as part of the Scottish Government’s wider Equally Safe strategy. That’s why we’re called Equally Safe in Higher Education.”

As part of its broad aim to increase understandings of gender based violence, ESHE is also launching a new online course next week called ‘Understanding Violence Against Women: Myths and Realities’. So far, the course has had over 3000 people sign up from all over the world, and organisers are hoping to get even more people involved.



Best Article –
Feature

PAUL NUTTALL'S BURQA BAN SEEMS TO FORGET THAT THE PUBLIC ARE MORE AT RISK FROM WHITE MEN THAN MUSLIM WOMEN

Kirsty Strickland

Independent

24 April 2017

Men kill, maim and rape in greater numbers than similar crimes committed by women, regardless of race or religion. Yet, as a group, we don't characterise them as a risk to public safety or place any restrictions upon them.

This weekend Ukip leader Paul Nuttall was interviewed on the Andrew Marr Show. He set out a new manifesto commitment to ban the face veils worn by some Muslim women, such as the burqa and niqab. This policy is at odds with comments he has previously made about face coverings. In 2013, he said:

"What we wouldn't do is go down the line of enforcing a blanket ban. We are a libertarian party."

Nuttall explained his U-turn by citing the security threat facing the UK, saying:

"In an age of heightened terror, you need to see people's faces"

When pressed by Andrew Marr on why Muslim women should face legislation about what they wear and not him, Nuttall responded "but you can see my face – I am not a security threat."

Nuttall might not be known for letting facts guide his judgement, but it is important to lay some out at the offset here.

Women make up only around five per cent of the prison population of the UK. 81 per cent of female prisoners are serving a sentence for a non-violent crime. If you do some Google research you will, of course, be able to find examples of women doing terrible things. That doesn't detract from the fact that majority of violent crime is committed by men. Though terrorist incidents in the UK are comparatively uncommon, these too, are overwhelmingly carried out by men. In America, where access to guns makes mass killings more common than in the UK, 98 per cent involve a male perpetrator.

I'm pointing out what should be obvious. Men kill, maim and rape in greater numbers than similar crimes committed by women, regardless of race or religion. Yet, as a group, we don't characterise them as a risk to public safety or place any restrictions upon them.

When discussing the cold, hard reality of male violence, the cries of "not all men" are never far behind. The suggestion that even some white men pose a direct danger to others is met with anger. How dare we tar them all with the same brush?

Men themselves are also far more likely to be killed or harmed by other men, than a woman. On average, two women per week are killed by a partner or ex-partner. This is a form of intimate terrorism that would be described as such if it were perpetrated against any other demographic.

If you pick up a newspaper today you will see examples of white men harming women, children, minority ethnic groups and each other.

It is unlikely that this week you will read any reports of a UK terrorist incident. Even less likely that a Muslim woman in a veil would be the culprit.

The idea that restricting the freedom of Muslim women will keep us safe is illogical. It completely disregards the reality of violent crime in the UK. What this policy proposal does do, however, is fuel hatred and intolerance. It demonises Muslim women, while bolstering those who think that ripping off a woman's niqab in the street is an act of patriotism.

Despite having no MPs, Ukip still dominate the agenda, aided by the right wing press. Scapegoating of Muslims is framed as reasonableness, or even good common sense.

In France, they have a full-face veil ban, as Nuttall pointed out during his Marr interview. Women can be fined up to €150 if they are veiled anywhere other than in their home, car or place of worship. If fined, they may also be required to attend a citizenship class.

The ban didn't prevent the devastating Bastille Day Promenade des Anglais truck attack. Nor did the ban make any difference when a man shot a police officer on the Champs Elysees. And if it were in place in the UK it wouldn't have prevented the Westminster bridge terror attack either.

Clothing restrictions wouldn't stop 85,000 women and 12,000 men being raped in England and Wales each year.

Violent crime is ever-present, incessant and deeply harmful to our society. The terror threat to the UK is currently judged to be "severe" and we should treat that with the seriousness it deserves. However, that is not what Ukip's veil ban for Muslim woman is designed to tackle. Dog whistle policies aren't a replacement for analytical, fact-based action and intolerance should not be allowed to drive decision-making. The reality is, punishing Muslim women won't end male violence. And it's high time we recognised that security threat for what it is.

WHY SEX FOR RENT IS NOT A DEAL LIKE ANY OTHER

Vonny Leclerc

The National

17 April 2017

ACROSS the UK there are women searching for places to live. Friends, mothers, sisters, aunts, the woman you sit next to on the bus, or in class, or stand behind in the supermarket line. Some of them are likely thinking about that roof over their head, adding and subtracting, mentally balancing the books and deciding what sacrifices can be made to make the rent. The capricious economic landscape has made this essential human need – the need for shelter – harder to grasp.

The national average for a double room is now nearly £500 a month, and an average overall property rent tips £815.

Rent has increased by an average of 20 per cent in two years. That means more mental arithmetic for many. It doesn't take a genius to conceive of the sizeable bite that takes out of most incomes, when real wages have declined more than in any other advanced country since the financial crisis. In fact, money spent on a place to stay is about half of what an average tenant takes home. In London it's 72 per cent. It's no news that we're in a housing crisis – but there are some willing to use this crisis to their advantage.

“Free accommodation for female student”

“If any young female student is in need of free of charge accommodation & is prepared to act as a ‘resource’ in return, then please provide full personal details & a recent pic & reply from your own private e-mail address please. No pic, no reply.” – Craigslist, July 2016

Scour the pages of Gumtree, Craigslist, or many other room rental sites, and you’ll find them: free room, rent negotiable, other ways to “show your appreciation”. Company. Nudity. Sex. These online adverts are ranged from the implied to the often explicit, with “landlords” shamelessly exploiting the women’s penury for personal sexual gain.

To meet the exigencies of the rental market, once more women’s bodies are being reframed as an acceptable commodity – something detached from a humanity, to be traded in exchange for a basic necessity. And technically speaking, it’s perfectly legal.

“I would expect a relationship in lieu of rent”

But what’s wrong with two adults in a mutually beneficial arrangement? What if both parties are going into it with their eyes open? Surely it’s a matter of personal choice? These are just some of the arguments I’ve heard to refute and defuse the seriousness of this situation.

“Free room for dirty housekeeping/ PA slut”

Fantasy about choice and situation dilute what’s taking place. It’s comforting to think of some edgy Sex In the City scenario – something a bit nudge-nudge, wink-wink. It’s tempting to consider ourselves as progressive enough that two adults could exchange resources, bodily or otherwise, and that individual actions don’t have net negative consequences for a specific group. It’s tempting to assume everything about such an arrangement would be cool and consensual because there was a conversation first. We might even like to tell ourselves it could be fun. Hey – there’s a reason this is a porn trope.

“You will be attractive, slim and willing to offer more intimate favours too”

When you think about it in these terms, in an imagined scenario, you selectively edit for palatability. You probably don’t think about the situation leading a woman to that advert, and you probably don’t imagine the act of payment in detail. Sex is too abstract a concept to consider the realities of what’s being traded here. We’re talking penis in vagina. In mouths. Hands on and in bodies. Things of course any woman can offer freely – but when you’re trading sex for rent, how free is that choice truly? If you’re a vulnerable woman with no place else to go – do you have the power to say no, or did you leave that at the door? Is it an acceptable price to reduce your own body to currency because you need somewhere to live? That doesn’t sound very sexy. Homelessness hanging on a “no” is a mood-killer.

“I have a nice room available in London for a girl who enjoys being a dirty little slut”

No woman should have to make the choice between giving sexual access to her body and affordable rent, but some are considering it, and putting themselves at risk in the process. We have to unpack not just why they’re making this decision, but why this “exchange” is being offered and why some “landlords” think this sort of offer is okay. It doesn’t matter if what’s on offer is a penthouse apartment or a crumbling bedsit – the distinction is irrelevant. Women shouldn’t have to put themselves in danger to secure a place to stay, blurring consent by entering a space where someone else has all of the power. Women shouldn’t have to fuck their way out of precarity.

“I’m seeking a beautiful young lady with a penchant for facesitting”

The men offering this arrangement either don’t see a problem, or wilfully ignore the reality of what they’re doing: dispossessing women of the right sexual freedom by offering something they desperately need. It’s not about consent or empowered sexual choices – it’s women being cornered and coerced into sex with their landlords because that’s the best option available to them. Women who find themselves making this choice likely aren’t doing it because it’s easy, fun and they really love sex with strange men. There is a backdrop of desperation that can’t be ignored. Rising rents. Falling wages. Zero-hours contracts. Part-time work. Seeking asylum. Fleeing domestic violence. Fleeing sexual violence. Leaving care. Impending homelessness. There are factors that predispose women to such a choice, and where there is desperation, there is always an opportunity for exploitation.

“In return I want a few minutes of sexy fun in the shower etc when I come to visit”

As long as women are at risk, and women are framed as sexual objects to men, this predatory behaviour will continue. We can’t ignore that what could be one woman’s personally empowering choice is normalising a behaviour that puts other women in danger. For now, we can report the ads, lobby our MPs for more affordable housing and continue to call this out for what it is: the preying on of vulnerable women in a climate of financial precarity.

But it will take a lot longer to fix the root cause. Until women are seen as fully human, and not valued sexually above all else, someone will sit down at a computer, write that ad, and think of themselves as generous.

“BRING ME MY SCOOTER SO I CAN LEAVE YOU”

Niki Tennant

PosAbility Magazine

3 April 2017

The shocking reality of disabled women who experience abuse at the hands of their carers.

Alarming statistics show that more than 50% of disabled women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

Women who have a disability are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse, and are up to five times more likely to be subjected to sexual violence.

Women with a physical, mental, sensory or intellectual impairment or a health condition that affects their daily lives can experience prolonged and severe domestic abuse from a wide range of perpetrators.

For women who are severely disabled, abuse can be lifelong. Studies have shown that domestic abuse can start after the onset of a disability.

By its very nature, the prevalence of domestic abuse is difficult to measure. But because disabled women are typically excluded from domestic abuse studies, it is highly likely that the figures are vastly underestimated.

Dr Jenna Breckenridge, Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, says studies have shown that disablist attitudes judge women to be abnormal, weak and a burden on society.

And the more you're told you are a burden, the more likely you are to believe it and somehow feel that the abuse is deserved.

Those same prejudices, she maintains, often portray disabled women as being 'asexual' and unlikely to have intimate relationships.

Studies have shown that girls and young women who have a disability have less access to sex education, and there is a notion that they do not understand. Jenna Breckenridge said: "Young disabled women might not have the same opportunity to go to parties, 'snog' boys and be in an informal learning environment.

"Health impairments that require assistance with personal care can be desexualising. Those women are used to having people help with toileting, washing and dressing, so they are used to being naked around other people – which means they do not have the same sense of what is private and what is not. This increases the opportunity for people who are doing the care to be abusive."

A result is that perpetrators might seek out disabled women as partners because they perceive them to be helpless, easy to control, confuse and manipulate and unable to think or do for themselves.

The perpetrator is likely to be a woman's main carer. And because they provide assistance with mobility, personal care, activities of daily living, transportation and finance, it makes it especially difficult for her to flee an abusive relationship.

Occupational therapist Dr Breckenridge highlights a relationship between a nondisabled person and a disabled person. In a scenario which has acquired the distasteful tag a 'Florence Nightingale partnership,' the non-disabled person is perceived to be a 'saint who takes on' a person with a disability - not because they love them, but because they are seemingly altruistic.

Abusive partners who fulfil a caring role are less likely to be suspected, and research shows that disabled women are often disbelieved when they muster the courage to disclose abuse.

Jenna Breckenridge says abused disabled women are reluctant to report abusive behaviour to health professionals or police during pregnancy for fear that they will be judged unfit mothers.

She said: "In addition to physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms of abuse, disabled women experience a distinct form of abuse that specifically targets their impairments. This form of abuse purposefully disables women further as they face double disadvantage."

Shocking, real-life examples of abusive partners taking advantage of person's limitations include:

- Shifting furniture or removing a non-slip bath mat so that a woman with a visual impairment will trip and possibly injure herself
- Making fun of a woman's learning disabilities
- Demanding sexual favours in return for helping with personal care
- Being rough or aggressive and placing a person in a degrading and uncomfortable physical position
- Filming a visually-impaired person while they are showering or bathing
- Removing the batteries from power wheelchairs

- Sabotaging communication devices and assistive technology
- Over or under-administering medication
- Deliberately confusing women with cognitive impairments
- Creating a social isolation situation to
- reduce the risk of abuse being uncovered
- Cruelty, neglect and abuse of assistance animals.

Because disabled women often receive support and assistance for daily living from various of sources, there's a greater risk of them being exposed to a wide range of possible perpetrators. Conversely, greater interaction increases the likelihood that signs of abuse will be detected.

Yet, despite having greater need for support services, it has been shown that disabled women are less likely to receive adequate access to specialist domestic abuse support from agencies across health, social care and the third sector.

Although the Disability Discrimination Act means that services are required to make reasonable adjustments, some charities and buildings are exempt from these rules, making it difficult for women with mobility issues to access refuge accommodation.

Even where there is physical access, some refuges cannot accommodate assistance animals or additional carers.

Basic care needs are often a key concern for women leaving an abusive partner, especially when he is her main carer. It's also known that women with learning disabilities are often not familiar with the term refuge and lack understanding about available support.

In most cases, the thoughts and feelings of women trapped in abusive relationships are left unsaid.

One of the women who took part in a recent study shared the one thing she longed to utter to her abusive partner, but didn't have the courage:

“Bring me my scooter so I can leave you.”

www.womensaid.org.uk

Dial 0808 2000 247 for a 24-hour national domestic violence helpline run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.

Case study

Jessie, who is deaf, was suicidal, depressed and self-harming. Her ex-partner was abusing her and Jessie felt she couldn't escape. She has been working with Young DeafHope Here, Jessie explains her story.

“When I first met a worker from Young DeafHope I had been in an abusive relationship, and was still being abused by my ex. I had also been hiding from my family for a few years.

In 18 months, I had moved 13 times trying to stay safe. I was in a bad way, suicidal, very depressed, self-harming and not eating. I was very ill.

My ex had abused me in many ways, physically, sexually, financially, harassment, blackmail, emotional and psychological abuse. They controlled everything I did. I lost all confidence and self-belief, and had no energy to leave.

Young DeafHope found me a safe refuge where I stayed for several months. I found this really hard, often becoming suicidal and I turned to drink to try to block out my bad memories. This led me to being thrown out of the refuge, but Young DeafHope helped me to find new accommodation.

With Young DeafHope support, I was able to get help for my depression and drinking and learn new coping strategies to prevent myself from negative thinking. Last year I was reunited with my family thanks to Young DeafHope support. I go to the gym to help cope with stress and have stopped drinking. My panic attacks are getting less.

Young DeafHope have helped me become assertive and confident and back in control of my life. I have now completed my first full year at college and feel really proud of myself. For the first time in seven years, I feel I have a future. I still have a way to go but I know I will be able to cope, and I know I can call YDH any time I need advice. I would recommend Young DeafHope to any young deaf person who is having problems with relationships.”

- Young DeafHope is a unique project working with young deaf people to raise awareness of abuse and domestic

DOMESTIC ABUSE: THIS ARTICLE WILL UPSET YOU BUT IT IS VITAL THAT YOU READ IT

Vicky Allan

Sunday Herald

18 September 2016

PAT is haunted, she says, by a violent incident from when her second child was still a small baby. She had called her husband while he was out one evening, asking him to come home to help her sort out a household water leak. When he arrived home at 2am she was awake and breastfeeding. The first thing he did was come up and punch her in the face while she was still holding the baby. He then went downstairs to get a Stanley blade to cut the carpet and trace the source of the leak, came back up, put the blade at her throat and dragged her down the stairs backwards. “He told me that I was nothing but a stupid, sad cow,” she says. “And that I created the leak to get him home.”

In the course of her marriage, Pat was not only punched, but knocked out, strangled, clapped around the ears so hard she could barely hear, dragged across the floor and kicked. She believes her husband tried to kill her three times. On one particularly terrifying occasion, she says, when she refused him sex he punched her several times in the head, knocking her out cold, then continued to kick her in the face.

Yet, what lingers more for her than the physical abuse is the psychological torture, the controlling behaviour and humiliation. “He told me I was a lunatic. He would tell the kids I was a bad mum. One time I got a bottle of gin as a present and I had a couple of drinks and fell asleep. He pulled the covers off, took my clothes off and took pictures of me, which he sent to me in the morning at my work. He said no wonder he doesn’t come near me, I’m alright from the neck up but I’m a fat cow.”

Though the bruises are gone, she says she still “lives with the mental torture”, a sentiment echoed by many victims of abuse. Until now such psychological torment has not been recognised under the law. However, last week MSPs debated in the Scottish Parliament the new Domestic Abuse Bill, which plans to create a specific domestic abuse offence recognising such “controlling and coercive behaviour” and could make Scotland one of the first countries in the world to criminalise partner psychological abuse.

What’s planned is a pioneering piece of legislation which encompasses both the horror of domestic physical violence and the interconnected torment of psychological abuse. Already in England there is a controlling and coercive behaviour offence, but it is narrow in scope. This particular law would be hugely symbolic. It would make clear, as Justice Secretary Michael Matheson, launching the planned draft bill at Edinburgh Women’s Aid last week pointed out, that “exerting total control over your partner’s every movement and action, forcing your partner to live in constant fear, is criminal and unacceptable in our society”.

Nearly 60,000 domestic abuse incidents were reported to Police Scotland in 2014-15 and it’s widely believed that this is a vastly under-reported crime. One Scottish survey found that only a fifth of those who had experienced partner abuse in the previous 12 months had said the police had been made aware of it. One of the problems, Matheson notes, is that such reporting has hitherto revolved around “incidents”, but actually domestic abuse is not like a housebreaking, where there is a single such incident – it’s about a pattern of behaviour, and the law needs to be changed to reflect this.

That physical abuse and controlling behaviour come as part of a pattern is something that has long been acknowledged by frontline organisations like Edinburgh Women’s Aid. Their chief executive Linda Rodgers notes that the majority of women coming to them have experienced some form of controlling or coercive behaviour. “For me the two are intrinsically connected.” The threat of physical abuse, she notes, is often used to enforce the control. “I think it’s always important,” she says, “to recognise that the reason why that controlling and coercive behaviour is effective is because there is fear underneath it.”

Partly, Rodgers argues, we need to recognise the way violence is being used. “Often there have been rules around behaviour and then a woman’s maybe been using the telephone when she’s not allowed and the violence is about bringing her back into line. It’s about maintaining control.”

Ways that this controlling behaviour manifests itself are varied, and include anything from controlling partners’ access to the toilet to stopping them from getting access to money. One woman who turned to Edinburgh Women’s Aid for help, Saadia, found the abuse began not long into her arranged marriage, and while occasionally terrifyingly violent, was more frequently psychological. “He just started chipping away at me,” she recalls. “He used to ask me where I was all the time. If I wore lipstick he would say, ‘Do you think you’re beautiful? Is that why you’re wearing lipstick? You’re nothing special.’ If he was on a phone call to his friends, which would sometimes be for hours, the kids and I would have to sit in silence.” While she was out working during the day, he would have women back to their home.

Frequently there are attempts to denigrate and crush the victim’s self-esteem. Pat, for instance, recalls: “He used to wash me after he’d battered me. He used to make me strip. He used to say, ‘You’re a sad little woman. You’re nothing. You’ll always be nothing. Nobody will want you. You’re damaged goods.’” Another victim, Anne, found that her partner would control her by undermining her. “It was like walking on eggshells. He would tell me that I was not parenting the kids properly, that I was fat, that I was worthless. When you’re hearing that all the time, you believe it.”

Often the abused say that they were isolated from friends and family, or any support. Pat recalls that her husband decided they should move, while she was pregnant and caring for a toddler, to a house out of town, leaving her stranded, away from family and friends.

Abuse victims are not solely female, though women are disproportionately affected: 79 per cent of domestic abuse reports feature women victims and male perpetrators. Rodgers believes this is because “the societal structures that give that permission don’t exist in the same way” for female perpetrators. “If you look at the sites of abuse, they are often around cooking, cleaning, the way the woman dresses - things that are seen as traditional women’s roles and that the male as the head of the household has a right to influence.”

The impact of such mental abuse is devastating for the victims. As Saadia puts it: “In eight years my husband hit me about 10 times. The rest was psychological. It’s hard to explain how much of a long term affect that has. I don’t think there is any way I could go back to being the strong woman I was before. Psychological abuse for me is bigger than physical. It has long lasting impacts. Not just for me for the children as well. They saw it. They were unfortunately witnesses to quite a lot of the abuse.”

Linda Rodgers hopes the impact of the legislation will send out a symbolic message that “this is what we recognise as domestic abuse in Scotland and that we think it’s unacceptable”. Already public attitudes towards domestic psychological abuse have started to shift a little, prompted partly the abuse plot-line in The Archers radio soap. Rodgers is hopeful that the new Bill will form a step towards a “domestic abuse free Scotland”. She believes this is possible and can be facilitated not only by such legislation, but also by increased gender equality. “Violence against women is less in countries that are more gender equal. The more equality that we have in Scottish society the less likely it is that violence against women will exist. We need to keep our eye on that prize. We need to believe we are capable of that.”

Saadia

Before I got married I was very strong and happy-go-lucky. My father had brought me up to be really independent. I had a degree. I was a senior manager at a big company, very successful. The abuse began from the time I got married, an arranged marriage to the son of my dad’s best friend from Pakistan. He wasn’t physically abusive at first, but he did want to control me. If I was 15 minutes late home from work, he would say to me, ‘Right so it took you two minutes to walk to the car and ten minutes to drive down the road. Why are you 15 minutes late?’ I would just fob it off and say, ‘do you think I went clubbing?’

Later, I fell pregnant and he said that he didn’t want children and he wanted me to abort my child. But I refused. I was a very strong person. But all the time he just chipped away at me. I started believing what he was saying. I stopped wearing make-up, which he disapproved of. I started gaining weight. I was depressed. Then he actually became physically abusive towards me. He threw a shoe at my head. Immediately he said he was sorry and that it was a mistake. But after that the violence became not regular, but acceptable. He would punch me and hit me, then apologise.

My work colleagues started asking, ‘What’s wrong with you? You’re so quiet now.’ I used to just start crying for no reason and I couldn’t explain it. I couldn’t tell anyone what was happening. There was nobody I could speak to. My parents were very happy that I was married and I didn’t want to upset them. I tried to speak to my sister once, but she didn’t get it. She just said, ‘Be strong.’

It was through my work that it all came out. I had a big job as a senior manager and you have to be really firm and I was becoming really subservient. Eventually my manager had a word with me and I just broke down and told him everything. He was in shock. I was referred to a psychiatrist who then put me in touch with Women's Aid. I met a lovely lady there and the first thing she did was give me a big hug and say, 'Are you okay?' I burst out crying. The fact that she acknowledged how awful what I was going through was gave me so much relief. Up till then I had been very alone.

She was the one who said to me, 'You know you could leave your husband if you want to.' She told me, 'You know you can phone the police.' Those words stayed with me and the next time he did hit me, I phoned them. When they came and took him away, it was an amazing feeling. I just thought, 'Oh, my children, they were crying in the corner when they saw my husband hitting me. I don't want them to go through that anymore.'

I've experienced both physical and psychological abuse. I don't have the bruises any more. I don't have the cut on my forehead, I don't have the burn he did to me. But I'm not the person I was. Today I find it hard to believe that I have a degree any more. I think, was that really me that went to university? Was that really me that had that big job? I now struggle to even apply for any job. The impact of psychological abuse is long-lasting. Because you become so subservient. It's 'Yes master, no master.' And that affects the rest of your life. You can't be that strong person you were before.

Anne

For me it was both psychological and sexual abuse. It started when I was pregnant. The abuser raped me when I was six months pregnant. I disclosed it to my mum, and I kicked him out the house. But a few weeks later my mum took a stroke. Then I gave birth to my son and the abuser actually wheedled his way back in. I had lost the support of my mum because she was ill and in a nursing home, and he knew that was a vulnerable time for me. I stupidly took him back and he psychologically abused me the whole time of my relationship. He tried to keep me isolated from friends and family. He would only let a few of my friends round, and then he would tell me that those friends were no good for me. So I became isolated. The control was making me feel worthless. He would tell me I was a bad mother, that I was fat.

Then, at one point we split up, and we were going to get back together, and my daughter disclosed that he had been sexually abusing her. I thought this can't continue. We contacted the police. Bail conditions were put in place, but he broke the bail conditions and that's when I had to go into refuge, because I didn't feel safe in my own home with my children. I was in a Women's Aid refuge for almost a year. While there I started to realise that the behaviour was not acceptable and that he had been abusing me from day one. When I met him, in a bar, he was very charming but it didn't take long for him to show his true colours. I think a lot of people were shocked when they learned my situation because he had also come over charming to them.

Names in this article have been changed.

RAPE: THE VICTIMS' STORIES

Hannah Rodger

The Evening Times

'Rape: The Victims' Stories' is a four part series by Hannah Rodger for The Evening Times.

Rape victim slams justice system after court proceedings: “After going through court, I would never do it again”

3 October 2016

RAPE and domestic abuse victims, and staff working on the front line with survivors say the courts and police are letting down victims, and the legal system is a deterrent for reporting sexual crimes. In the first of a series of investigations, HANNAH RODGER reveals what survivors or rape face when trying to challenge their abusers in court. All of the names have been changed in this story to protect the identity of the victims.

Rose: “After going through court, I would never do it again.”

During her 13-year marriage, Rose had endured years of mental, emotional and physical abuse.

Her ex-husband had battered her two young children, and beat her in front of them.

She was at first too scared to contact the police, and family pressure had forced her to stay with him - they did not want her to bring shame on them, or “damage” her children by separating from her husband.

After finally leaving, and reporting him to the police, she said she would never choose to go through it again and would not have made the same decision had she known what was going to happen.

The mum in her 40s from the South Side explained: “I had years of mental, emotional and physical abuse.

“The first few years were okay but he was a control freak, and didn’t want me to have friends.

“A big incident happened about five years ago when we had a big argument and a fight.

“He wanted sex, and I refused. So he started hitting me, slapping me, punching me.

“His knuckles started bleeding because he had hit me so much.

“All of this was in front of my youngest child.”

Over 15 minutes, Rose’s husband continued to beat her before taking her tiny son out of the room, coming back and raping her.

She said “He told me I had to make lunch for him, but my hands were so bruised I couldn’t even cut anything. Then he started hitting me on the hands again.”

Rose reported the incidents of abuse against her and her sons to the police in 2014, but the case was not heard in court until spring this year.

The trial had been delayed and rescheduled six times.

Each time, she had to mentally prepare herself and her children for what they were about to do – take to the stand and testify against their father.

The impact has had lasting damage on her and her kids.

She said: “The criminal justice system stinks. It was horrendous what we went through. They changed the date six times.

“That was so stressful and frustrating. I had to take myself, my mum, and my boys. We were all witnesses.

“I lost so much sleep.”

She said one of her sons was particularly affected by the whole process and retreated “into a shell” over the trial period.

In the end, her ex-husband was convicted of two crimes – one of abusing her, and one of abusing one of her sons.

“His lawyers struck a deal meaning the rape charge would be discounted, and he received an 18 month sentence.

Rose said: “I’ve tried to just forget about it and move on. When I think about it I start crying, I get depressed.

“He got 18 months. It’s a slap in the face. He’ll be out in nine months

“After everything he put me and my boys through, what is the point?

“All the sleepless nights, contacting the police, waiting for 18 months for this to go to trial, and for what? Nine months is nothing to him.

“If I knew what would have happened, the delays, the waiting, the damage to my family, I don’t think I would go through it all again. No.”

Gemma: “I would have trusted him with my life; he was like a brother”

Gemma, in her late 20s, was raped by a man she thought of as a brotherly figure and best friend.

One night Gemma was out with the man and two friends. She noticed his behaviour had started changing as she had been texting a guy she had recently met.

After a few drinks at a city centre nightclub, the group headed back to a friend’s flat.

Gemma said: “I fell asleep on the couch, he carried me through to the bedroom. I rolled over on to my back, and I was still aware of what was going on but I was kind of half asleep.

“He climbed on top of me, started pulling my leggings down to my knees.

“I thought if he tried anything I would need to get him off. He started trying to force himself inside me.

“My legs were as straight and as tense as possible, I just kept thinking I needed to get him off me. I kicked him off, and just ran. I ran into the living room, tried to close the door.”

After she was raped, Gemma struggled for years with mental health problems and still has OCD.

She was put off contacting the police at first after visit a GP who was sceptical of her story, which she believes was because she had been drinking on the night of the rape.

She said: "The doctor said some people get so drunk they don't know what happened to them, and I should be thankful that wasn't me. He said I shouldn't bother reporting what happened.

"The fact alcohol was involved did have an impact.

"The police did seem to be used to that side of it but when they were asking for my statement they want to know how many glasses you were drinking, did you drink before you went out, what you were drinking exactly. A lot of it was focused on alcohol."

Police told Gemma there was not enough evidence to take her attacker to court, and in some ways she says she was relieved.

Four years later she had started moving on with her life when things came to an unexpected halt.

She said:" I had just finished my counselling at the Glasgow rape crisis centre, I had come off my medication for my anxiety, I was nine months pregnant, and the police chapped my door.

"He had reoffended."

The thoughts around what had happened to Gemma instantly came flooding back, but she knew she had to help lock him up before he attacked again.

The evidence from both rapes were used together to convict the man, and he has now been sentenced to 10 years behind bars. He raped both women while they were sleeping, in very similar circumstances.

Gemma also said she would not go through the court process again as it has had such a traumatic experience on her life.

She said: "You forget you're not the one on trial when you go to court.

"You, the victim, can't see anything. He can see the medical documents, he can see all my statements, the impact it has had on me but I am not allowed to know anything.

"My OCD came back with a vengeance as soon as the police contacted me.

"My anxiety has been really bad and my husband can't come near me.

"It also has an effect on my kids. It means I can't enjoy my kids as much as I would like to.

"If you're sitting playing with them and you have something as big as that in the back of your head, you can't enjoy it as much.

"I can't be a mother as much as I would like to."

Rape victim shares diary entries on day friend who raped her was found guilty

4 October 2016

Sarah was raped by a friend six years ago.

She initially contacted the police but after several months she found the experience too traumatising to continue with the prosecution. Years later, she received a visit from officers who were investigating another rape. They told her the man had raped again, and asked if she would testify.

In the latest in a series of investigations into rape and the justice system, here she records her thoughts and feelings during the trial.

Day 0 – Wednesday

Court was due to start but as other cases were delayed the week before, my case has also been delayed. You hear on a day-to-day basis whether the trial is going to be the next day or not. Today I was going to be meeting the Advocate Depute (AD) who would be prosecuting the case. At first I was nervous but I was met by the loveliest woman took me to meet him.

My advocacy worker from rape crisis and friend was there to support me as well.

When it came to the meeting, I had to go on my own without my advocacy worker or friend, to meet the AD.

I was surprised at how down to earth and human he was. I expected someone quite disconnected and maybe cold but he was the opposite and made me feel at ease straight away regarding court. I was told to expect court to start the following Monday.

I left feeling much better but a few hours later I got a phone call telling me the case was in actual fact to begin tomorrow afternoon and I was first up.

My stomach sank. I felt sick. It was actually happening. I called my advocacy worker and everyone who needed to know.

Day 1 – Thursday - First day in court

I'm feeling not too bad after praying the night before and after encouraging texts from friends and family.

My friend and my advocacy worker came with me but my friend couldn't stay as she is a witness and once I am taken to give evidence we cannot discuss the case.

I am introduced to an elderly lady from Victim Support - she would be sitting with me in court.

Although she was friendly I could've done with less chat. I would've rather my rape crisis advocacy worker was allowed in with me. We had built up a good relationship.

I was called in and affirmed I would tell the truth and the prosecution began. The AD's manner was calm - he asked about myself, my job, my kids (that was a lump in my throat). We went along a timeline running up to the night of the rape. I was difficult to discuss and I did get upset but it wasn't as bad as I had thought. I knew I had done well and I was so proud of myself.

Day 2 – Friday

Today was the day I would get questioned by the defence. I felt okay as I had a better idea of what to expect. I was called in and little did I know I was about to experience one of the most re-traumatising events of my life so far.

Court was set out the same as the day before. I couldn't see the accused as I had requested screens to be put up to help me give better evidence.

The defence spent the first 15 minutes harassing me about exactly how much I had to drink and if I was drunk.

He then went on for about 1 hour and 20 minutes about whether the accused had actually penetrated me or not.

He told me I was looking at him as if he was about to pounce on me. He made me feel tiny. Why was I having to prove my innocence? I was not the one on trial!

He spent the last 10 minutes telling me I was a liar and it was in fact me who attempted to have sex with him, and I was embarrassed that he rejected me so I decided to fabricate this lie and accuse him of raping me.

My rape happened almost 6 years ago and I had decided back then that I couldn't face a court case.

Within the next four years I received counselling and was learning to get on with my life. The police showed up at my door to ask if they could use my statements for an enquiry they were looking into. I could have said no, and continued with my life. But I chose to do what I deemed right. I chose to put myself and my family through one of the most traumatic experiences. Yet I was accused of being the liar. I wonder how many more victims there are? I was doing what I could to protect other woman from this predator. Once the defence was finished with me I broke down. My whole body was shaking and I felt sick.

During intervals and breaks because I had already given my evidence there was no more special measures for me.

I had to just walk around the court in fear of bumping into my rapist and his entourage he brought along with him every day.

I couldn't get in through the back door, nothing. It was just a case of 'oh well get over it'.

Thankfully it eventually became liberating for me. At first I couldn't even look at him. As the days went on I regained some of that power he stole from me all those years ago. I could walk past him and look at him and not fear any more. I could look at him and not want the world to swallow me whole or be reminded of what he did to me. I regained some strength and that in itself was worth more than the court case.

Day 3 - Monday

I had no idea what to expect today - I was absolutely worn out. Sitting at the back and watching the case was so much more difficult than I had thought it would be. It had gotten to the point every time my name was mentioned I felt physically sick.

The first witness was a doctor I had seen shortly after I had been raped. I was suffering suicidal thoughts and anxiety I hadn't got the best advice from him originally. I had left the

surgery feeling disappointed with a handful of self-help leaflets which I don't think I once looked at. Nevertheless he stood and gave evidence and it was sufficient for the case.

Next it was the next victim to give evidence so it would be a closed court.

Over the next day it was the other victim's witnesses. I sat through all evidence for this other victim and I was absolutely horrified. Our stories were almost exactly identical, it was scary.

Day 4 - Wednesday

After all the witnesses had given their evidence it was then up to the AD to tie up his case. Then the defence would do the same and then it was time for the verdict. The AD done a very good job of tying everything up. At the end of the day this is a prosecutor, he does not get paid by us. He is not representing me, he represents the public.

Rape cases sadly seldom make it to court due to lack of evidence or the victim not wanting to go through the whole ordeal and I completely understand that.

It is probably one of the most difficult things I will ever have to endure. The defence took his turn at tying up his case and again he was so arrogant and theatrical it was horrible to watch. How can someone sleep at night knowing they are defending people that commit these types of crimes? He made out how good a person the accused is. I previously believed he was a good guy - we were close friends before he attacked me. Some of the things the defence was saying about him were true but it doesn't change the fact he is a predator. What does a rapist look like? What do they act like? If we were able to tell by someone's personality that they were going to be a rapist they wouldn't get away with it. They would be locked up before it happened.

The jury went on to deliberate. I have never felt so nervous in my life. It was almost time for the court to shut and I so hoped they would come to a decision before the end of the day. Unfortunately they didn't and we were to come back again tomorrow.

Day 5 – Thursday

Verdict day. I was so ill I couldn't eat, in fact I had barely eaten the whole week. We waited around for a few hours all with our stomachs in our throats. My friend had been sick with nerves. Eventually we got the call - the jury had decided. We all got back into the court room. He sat down the front where he had been all week.

Time seemed to just be going so slowly. I just needed to know so it could be finished. My life for the past 6 years has been on and off torment from what he done to me; I needed closure. I was far from it but this verdict was a step in the right direction. The jury came in and the court clerk asked what the verdict was on case 1, my case. Guilty. And case 2. Guilty. That was it. It was finished. He was found guilty!

He was handcuffed and the judge who had kept such a neutral position the whole way through the case really spoke some harsh words. He was called an opportunistic predator and he was to expect a very lengthy sentence.

He was taken away as he left he gave myself and the other girl a look that will haunt me for the rest of my life.

It was his last look to intimidate us - that last bit of power he tried to gain.

If you are a victim of rape, domestic violence or sexual abuse, contact the police on **101**, or Glasgow Rape Crisis on Freephone **08088 00 00 14**.

System is limiting help to rape victims say crisis care staff

5 October 2016

A pioneering scheme set up to encourage survivors of rape to report their experiences is letting down victims after just two years, say staff working on the project.

The Support to Report scheme aims to help more people through the process of talking about rape, reporting it to police and ultimately taking the case to court.

Staff working at Glasgow's Rape Crisis Centre say they have faced challenges with the courts in allowing them to accompany survivors who are giving evidence against their attackers.

They also say they are often seen as a service which "gives people hugs", and are not treated as professionals by members of the police and courts service.

Speaking to the Evening Times, staff said the scheme, which was piloted in Glasgow in 2013 before being rolled out nationally, is not receiving enough referrals from police officers who are contacted by victims of rape.

In a six month period, between April and August this year, police Scotland referred 32 people to Glasgow Rape Crisis. However, in the last 12 months, the Glasgow support to report scheme has received 200 referrals which they say mainly comes from individuals, and from other rape crisis centres.

Cat Storr, the Support to Report coordinator at Glasgow rape crisis, has been working on the project since it was founded.

She said: "The police were supposed to refer to us so we, the advocacy workers, would be present at that time when statements were being made but that isn't happening at all.

"There have been so many cases where the way that it was offered to the survivor, it wasn't encouraging them to come and see us. It came across like they didn't want the support."

Officers working in Glasgow's rape investigation unit have disagreed and say they offer 100 percent of victims the option of a referral to rape crisis however they don't always take it.

Craig Willison, Detective Inspector in Glasgow's divisional rape investigation unit said: "As a matter of course, when we get a report of a rape, we ask for the consent of the victim to refer them to rape crisis. We will automatically do that, and a lot of the victims take up that referral.

"We pass on their details and rape crisis will make contact with them.

"We deal with victims at a time of crisis, when it is traumatic for them.

"Sometimes people don't want the referral. If they don't, we check back again in two weeks and then two weeks after that. If the victim is still not ready we can go back later, it's particular to that victim and that case, but we have to have their consent."

Workers on the support to report project say they have also had difficulty in being allowed to accompany survivors into court when they have to give evidence against their attackers.

Paula Dunn, who has worked at Rape crisis for the last 12 years, said victims will give better evidence if they are supported by an advocacy worker who they know.

She said: "The courts are not taking in to consideration that giving evidence is traumatic but particularly so in sexual crimes. The trauma a witness goes through is increased by giving evidence.

"They will give better evidence if they feel they have somebody sitting behind them who knows them, who understands them."

Cat added: "We would usually phone up the Procurator Fiscal's office, victim support and victim information and would request that we can sit with them.

"We don't talk, we don't do anything. We just literally sit there.

"We are professionals, but we are there for her to know that there is someone who understands what she is feeling.

"I had one case where I had requested my name on the list to be able to support the survivor in court. We went back and forth and the victim information service said yes, but it would be up to the court on the day whether I could sit in with her or not.

"On the day when the case started, the Procurator Fiscal said no as I could influence the case, there could be accusations of me prompting the survivor.

"It's really very unfair. We are a professional organisation. We may have some knowledge of the case but often not a lot, we are there to support her."

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service said they have recently discussed the issues with Rape Crisis and have made changes to ensure staff are allowed to accompany victims into court.

A spokesman said: "Victims of rape and other sexual crime are automatically entitled to certain special measures, namely a support person, a screen or to give evidence by CCTV link, which will allow a witness to give the best possible evidence and to reduce, as far as possible, the anxiety that involvement in court proceedings can raise.

"The primary agency facilitating supporters for witnesses at Court in recent years has been the Victim Support Scotland, Witness Service. Their volunteers have been comprehensively trained in this role and the Courts are accustomed to dealing with them.

"The Crown have always been open to utilising other agencies if considered best placed to fulfil the role and support a witness in a particular case.

"We have been notified of a number of cases where the Courts displayed reluctance to grant applications for Rape Crisis staff to carry out this role and the Crown have discussed this at a national level with Rape Crisis Scotland and provided an assurance to them that there is no difficulty in principle, or indeed any legal bar, to their Rape Crisis Support and Advocacy Workers facilitating the role of court supporter for victims."

If you are a victim of rape, domestic violence or sexual abuse, contact the police on **101**, or Glasgow Rape Crisis on Freephone **08088 00 00 14**

‘There is no time limit to reporting a sexual assault’

6 October 2016

SPECIALIST sexual crime officers have vowed to hunt down those who commit sex attacks – no matter how long ago they carried out their crimes.

Police who work on Police Scotland’s dedicated rape investigation unit have encouraged victims who may have been abused historically to come forward, as it may help them catch perpetrators who could have attacked others.

In an exclusive interview with the Evening Times, Craig Willison, Detective Inspector at Glasgow’s divisional rape investigation unit, and Detective Sergeant Sarah McGill, a trained sexual offences liaison officer (SOLO) told of how they are committed to helping rape victims and catching their attackers.

In Glasgow, there is a dedicated team of officers, including three detective inspectors, five detective sergeants and 20 detective constables, who work only on sexual crimes, and help to support victims.

The squad make it their mission to help victims, and say their approach is victim-focused no matter how long ago their attack took place.

DI Willison said: “There is absolutely no time limit to reporting a rape or sexual assault.

“In our unit we’ve had a report from 1966, and others historically. “No matter how long ago it happened, you have my assurances if someone comes forward we will take their report, we will investigate it thoroughly.

“They will get the quality of service they would get at any time, whether it is historic or whether its happened recently.

“I would encourage people to come forward.”

DI Willison said his team’s approach is all about supporting victims of rape, and they work closely with partners at Rape Crisis to ensure they get the best help.

He said: “The policy for Police Scotland is that all reports of rape will have a senior investigating officer allocated to it.

“It must be of the rank of at least inspector. We have oversight of the whole investigation.”

He explained that SOLOs are a key part of the team and they make sure the victim is updated and liaise with services such as Rape Crisis.

He said: “We have SOLO officers is to give victims of such crimes the best quality service we can give them.

“It means we can treat the victims the way they should be treated, give them a service they deserve and make sure they are supported from the minute they come in to report it to the police, through the investigation, through referrals to our partners right through to the court process.”

For the officers working on the unit, their biggest sense of achievement comes from catching perpetrators and ensuring victims are safe.

DS Willison described a recent case where the whole team pulled together and the culprit was behind bars less than 24 hours after the crime was reported.

He said: “The person came in in the morning, and it was a live incident, it had just happened.

“We threw all our resources at it – two people dealing with the victim, someone looking at where it happened and the suspect, a team looking at CCTV, a team asking witnesses, and we also had someone doing telephone work.

“By 8pm that night, the guy was locked up. That’s what it is all about or us.

“We try our best to give a victim the best service they can get.

“We want them to walk away with some sort of closure, we want ultimately to give them a good result.

“Ultimately we want them to get their life back.”

DS Sarah McGill is one of the 20 SOLOs who act as the single point of contact for individual victims from the moment they report their attack.

They have to have special training over a week, and are assessed before they can work as a SOLO.

She said it helps victims, who have often never told anyone about their rape, to cope with the new legal and police environment which they are usually not familiar with.

“I have taken a number of statements over the years when the victim has never told anyone, and they have got the courage to come in.” explained DS McGill.

“That’s the main concern in some cases, just telling someone. After that we help them through the process.

“The SOLO is responsible for taking a statement from the victim.

“We appreciate it can be traumatising, so wherever they want to do the statement we will do it – in their house, in the police office or even with our partners such as Rape Crisis.

WE are also there during the forensic medical, and are responsible for updating them as the inquiry progresses, even up to the very end stage when it goes to court.

“It’s always the same person. It’s very much victim-centred.”

DS McGill said working with Rape Crisis provides an excellent opportunity to further support the victim and give them access to as much help as possible.

She said: “As a SOLO you realise how fundamental Rape Crisis can be at getting the victim on board and maintaining that cooperation with the police enquiry.

“Often people will detach from the enquiry but they are very good at asking people to keep on board and its good to work in partnership with someone else who has the same goal.”

If you are a victim of rape, domestic violence or sexual abuse, contact the police on **101**, or Glasgow Rape Crisis on Freephone **08088 00 00 14**.



Best Article – Blog and Comment

NEWS BLACKOUT – WHY AREN'T BLACK BRITISH WOMEN TREATED FAIRLY IN THE MEDIA?

Layla-Roxanne Hill

NUJ Scotland

30 March 2017

Layla-Roxanne Hill was invited by NUJ Scotland to write an article about women and the media as part of the Stronger Voice for Women in the Media project. The aim of the project is to improve representation of women working in the media and how women are represented by the media.

She is a campaigner, writer and speaker with a focus on race, gender and the Black Scottish experience. In addition, she sits on the STUC Black Workers' Committee, the National Union of Journalists' Black Members' Council and Scottish Executive Council as Black Members' Representative.

Despite the work seemingly being done to address the (mis)representation of Black British women, we are still being treated unfairly throughout the media landscape. Our stories, experiences and issues are continuously being told through a white lens which often fails to provide an accurate representation, or lend its focus to race.

One look at how black entertainers, victims or alleged criminals are covered by the majority of media outlets, makes it clear we are still seen and discussed as foreign entities; and that is if we make it into the pages at all. Positive role models are often depicted by the media as 'black music' stars, actors in 'black roles' or sportspeople and therefore implies limited life choices. Where are the 55 black female University professors who teach in the UK?

Stories like those of Doniele, a black woman from St Vincent and the Grenadines – a Commonwealth country – who was detained in Yarl's Wood Centre after living in the UK for 18 years, failed to make the headlines or receive any column inches, despite winning an award after it appeared online.

Perhaps there would be better balance in media story telling if there were black people in those offices? Recent research suggests that won't be happening in a meaningful way anytime soon. Research undertaken by City University London had 700 responses from a sample that is broadly representative of the total population of UK working across broadcast, print and digital in local, regional and national news organisations in the UK. It discovered that British journalism is 94% white and 55% male.

Talented black female writers exist in the UK, who can write about more than just race. In light of those statistics, Samantha Asumadu created Media Diversified, with the aim to highlight the lack of representation in the media and provide a space for writers of colour to publish their work. The writers for Media Diversified do not focus solely on race, book reviews, economic analyses and political commentary provide much of the content, as well as support to others already working in the industry. More recently, Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff was presented with the Georgina Henry Award at the Press Awards on 15 March for gal-dem, a publication which covers the experiences of black and minority ethnic women in Britain.

Within current mainstream media structures, it is more important to go viral than tell impactful stories that truly reflect our society. Most media companies have made their money by helping advertisers, which are mostly white owned businesses, reach the typically white mainstream

audience. This is why you are more likely to see content about cats than honest depictions of Black British women. Race related issues are often relegated to opinion pieces.

Chasing headlines and clicks is the result of a system that encourages media companies to prioritise going viral over telling stories of substance; a system that undervalues black women everywhere.

Rather than only being able to write about race in the mainstream media and often on a freelance basis, black women journalists, writers, podcasters, photo and videographers are being forced to seek alternatives and create spaces where they can do what they love with the satisfaction of black British women as their only goal – and get paid what they actually deserve.

We are seeing an increase of online spaces such as Empower, gal-dem and Media Diversified, all of which are online media created through a desire to have an authentic experience of black women.

In Scotland, where the population of black and minority ethnic people in the media is significantly lower than the rest of the UK, these spaces often provide an opportunity to have the Black Scottish experience seen and heard. However, as with offline spaces, online spaces come with a fear of safety, as a number of serious and concerning cases disclosed in part of a collaborative pilot by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the University of Strathclyde in May 2015 demonstrated. This particular study identified much of the abuse as political but there were also cases of sectarian, sexist, racist and homophobic abuse and more than 80% of those who responded stated they had not reported the abuse to police.

As black women, we are likely to receive abuse based on our ethnicity and gender. In February, Claire Heuchan, a PhD student at Stirling University, wrote an opinion piece for the Guardian in which she supported Sadiq Khan's claims that there were parallels between Scottish nationalism and racist movements elsewhere in the world. Although Heuchan received considerable praise for her piece, this was overshadowed by many who disputed she was in fact Scottish and a comment on her blog calling her an African who had no right to discuss ethnic white Scottish affairs. Fearing over her physical safety, Heuchan deleted her Twitter account.

More needs to be done to protect women who voice an opinion online. Systematic racism, sexism and harassment online has a huge impact on women's wellbeing and ability to do their job. Many freelancers use an online presence to gain employment, whilst most people in employment are expected to have some form of online presence. Let us not allow online spaces to become as unsafe, discriminatory and exclusionary as our offline spaces have become.

“JUST IGNORE IT”

Talat Yaqoob

Women 50:50

31 July 2017

Talat Yaqoob is Chair and Co-founder of Women 5050.

Over the course of the weekend, the Women 5050 campaign was, as ever, given advice from a number of men who in their own words were, “doing us a favour”. The favour they

were doing us was a helpful reminder of how women should respond to online misogyny (Yes, the irony was lost). The advice neatly fitted into one of two categories and I would like to take some time to explain why neither of these provide any helpful advice and detract from the importance of the issue:

Category 1. Ignore it – because the person being a misogynist isn't worth it or our time is more valuable

Has ignoring something, ever really made it go away? Women online could ignore misogyny all they like, but it will still come in droves and it will still attempt to silence them. If your first reaction to a woman online being abused is to recommend she ignores it, you either have no appreciation of the impact such abuse has or do not care. Whilst it may seem helpful to suggest we do not give the abuse oxygen, the reality is, covering our eyes and ears only makes the abuse silent to us individually, it does not overcome the problem.

Category 2: There's bigger fish to fry – because there are real issues to deal with and we should know better.

We get told that online misogyny is nothing compared to FGM, domestic abuse and rape, those are real issues that we should be fighting. Well, firstly, violence exists on a spectrum and it is incredibly ill informed to think misogyny online is not linked to misogyny and abuse in "real life". Secondly, we have the capacity and intelligence to fight against and care about online misogyny and all of the things you deem "more important".

Here's some examples of what our women parliamentarians have to deal with, which took me no more than 3 clicks to find. Please be aware, there is misogynistic and abusive language used here



Yes, I doubt there is an MSP or MP today who has not experienced some abuse online, but women MSPs and MPs experience a gendered or sexualised version of it. Study after study has confirmed it. For instance here, where a survey focused on men, still illustrated that women suffered more: "The survey of men found that women were twice as likely to be attacked purely because of their gender. One in four serious and violent threats directed at women were related to their gender, compared with one in 16 for men.". If we look at MPs specifically the abuse is again, gendered, more likely to be experienced by women and often includes sexual violence.

Why does this matter to the Women 5050 campaign? Because sexist abuse online and the disproportionate abuse of our women leaders prevents other women from aspiring to these roles. Last year, GirlGuiding UK released a report stating that “49% of girls aged 11–21 say fear of abuse online makes them feel less free to share their views”. Earlier this year, Unison Wales told us that online abuse was putting women off politics.

Finally, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published a report in 2016 with 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries stated that “This study shows that social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians.”

If we want to see a more diverse Scottish Parliament, if we truly want to eradicate the gendered barriers preventing women from entering politics, then it is all of our responsibility to call out sexism in every place we find it; whether online or in our debate chambers.

If you see us tweeting to condemn online abuse of women, our supporters and our MSPs/MPs, why not considering joining us rather than talking down our efforts? Why not be part of a movement which stands up to sexism and be part of the fightback to make our politics a hate-free space? Hopefully, what is written here, gives you an insight into the damage of online misogyny and the consequence of staying silent about it.

WHY THE DIALOGUE ON STREET HARASSMENT NEEDS TO REMAIN OPEN

Lindsay Linning

Engender blog

30 March 2017

Lindsay Linning is a MSc student at Edinburgh University in Sociology and is currently preparing her dissertation on gender-based street harassment, as well as working in conjunction with Hollaback! Edinburgh. Here she writes on her experiences of street harassment and the results of a recent Hollaback! survey.

Maybe it was that time the guys in Toulouse packed into their car roared at me that I was a whore, following me, repeating that insult, whore, whore, whore. I broke down to a group of workmen nearby – “Vous entendez ce qu'ils me disent?!” – “Do you hear what they're saying to me?!” – I was met with blank stares, an awkward look or two. By the evening, I'd put it out of my mind. Boys will be boys, I was told.

Or maybe it was that time the guys in Rome publicly dropped their trousers, reached down, and began to masturbate. Six different men, on six different occasions, across a 48-hour period. The youngest man, around 30. The oldest, around 70. My friends and I were 18 years old, interrailing during our first summer of freedom after school. ‘Is this freedom?’ we thought to ourselves. And we left that city, laden with backpacks, again putting it out of mind. They just love foreign girls, we are told.

Or maybe it was that time the guy grabbed me in the bar, pushed up against me, viciously. Or the time the guy followed me relentlessly for several hours on his bike on a baking summer's day. Or was it that night by my halls in Glasgow, alone, when the guy purred up in his car, rolled down the window and detailed what he wanted to do to me? Shouldn't have been walking there alone. Especially not at night, I am told.

The accounts above are my answers to the question ‘What was your worst experience of street harassment?’ Am I able to put these experiences into a hierarchy of the trauma they have caused? How do you measure the impact of such events when they become the fabric of everyday life as a female? And, perhaps what I have struggled with most, how do you articulate street harassment when so many doubt the veracity of your claims and indeed argue it is merely part and parcel of the experience of being a woman?

Results of a survey carried out by Hollaback! Edinburgh this month details the most commonly used adjectives by respondents to describe their feelings at the time of being harassed in Edinburgh: angry, uncomfortable, scared, unsafe. Yet they tell us to ‘smile, love!’ or to take it as a compliment. But why should we? and how can we when harassment forms part of a continuum of violence, with the victim never knowing if and when it may escalate into something more sinister? Intrusion by male strangers in women’s everyday lives in public projects one overarching message: I belong here and you do not. It is a reminder that public space is still, to our disdain, very much a man’s world.

Perhaps what is most troubling about the phenomenon of street harassment is that it takes just one incident to leave an indelible mark upon the victim. This mark can take many forms: maybe she decides to never wear that dress again (jeans will attract less attention), starts to avert her eyes when going about her daily life (that way I’m not asking for trouble), or decides to stop running outdoors (men love a lycra-clad bum). Maybe she simply feels a deep sense of unease when out and about. Harm manifests itself in a multitude of forms. And at the heart of all this is that these strategies we take as women – to protect ourselves, to prevent ourselves from falling into harm’s way, to essentially try to live a safe life in public – take up our time. They take up our energy – energy that could be better invested into something bigger and better. Both consciously and subconsciously as women we are constantly monitoring ourselves and our surroundings, and we are conditioned into a state of alertness. 22 per cent of the Hollaback! survey respondents cited avoiding eye contact as their harassment management strategy. 17 per cent stated they avoid going out at certain times. 16 per cent avoid certain places. It shouldn’t be this way.

The dialogue on street harassment needs to remain open. To tackle this pervasive problem rife on streets across the world we need to keep talking about it. We need to see a cultural shift in society’s acceptance of street harassment, and for this to happen we need stories to be told. I’ve been met with many an incredulous look or startled expression of disbelief when I have recounted the stories I opened this piece with above. They might make people uncomfortable, laugh awkwardly or defensive, but every reaction has its own value. Because it’s not ‘just a compliment’ or a question of ‘taking a joke’. It’s a matter of not just wanting but *needing* to be entitled to live our lives as equals out in the world.

‘JOANNE’

Coordinated and supported by the Encompass Network, ‘Inside Outside’ amplifies the voices of women who are, or have been, involved in the sex industry in Scotland. These are voices not often heard in the mainstream press, and often drowned out on social media.

This is Joanne’s story.

Inside Outside

I am in my early thirties.

I was inside the sex industry in Scotland for around seven years.

I first became involved in street prostitution when I was 18.

I exited the sex industry over two and a half years ago and I have no plans to return.

I am really enjoying spending more time with my daughter, I have a new home and enjoy spending time chilling there.

I love reading and researching new information and I am now at college. When I finish I want to have a career supporting other women affected by the sex industry.

When I was wee I wanted to be a vet but I think loads of wee girls want to be that! I loved animals. I still do.

When I was about 18 my heroin habit was really bad, and by that time I had been kicked out the house.

My family weren't talking to me, so I'd actually been going into the city centre to score drugs. When I was in there, I'd seen different girls involved in prostitution, they had money and that's really how I get involved. It's very hard to put myself back in that place. I feel sad for that time...

It's a very lonely place, street prostitution, very lonely and very isolated. I mean you feel kinda on the outside of society because people obviously are seeing you on the street and people know what you're there for. It's just not nice... not very nice.

I was out there probably on and off for about seven years at different times. It was so hard to actually break away from it because it's a means to an end and you just have to do it to get that money for drugs. That's the only way you know how to get money.

It wasn't easy to be involved in it. You have to disconnect yourself really from reality to be able to do it. You just have to kind of put your mind into a different place and obviously that goes on to affect you later on. You don't have a lot of self-worth in yourself. You don't value yourself. You don't value your opinion. You don't respect yourself. You think very low of yourself. It takes an awful lot away from you as a person to do it.

It's like kinda groundhog day. It's the same thing day in and day out, just doing the same thing. Every time you go and do that it's taking a bit of you away... every single time you're doing it.

You kinda pull back and you don't really want to be about people cos you're so ashamed. You're ashamed of what you're doing. I think it's just very hard to go through it.

Out on the street, you're out there yourself. I mean some girls do interact with each other but most don't. You're there do your own thing and then go away. There wasn't any support from anybody at all. I was literally on my own. I never had my own tenancy or anything like that so I was just going with somebody for somewhere to stay. I came into contact with this service that was providing free condoms, you could see a doctor or a nurse, get something to eat. You could get support as well but you had to be willing to take the support for yourself first. There was people who used to go in the street and give you sandwiches and things like that and a hot drink. That was it.

I had a boyfriend. He was using drugs as well. I would go out and he would be with me and he would stand and wait at a bus stop. Every time I came back from a punter, I would go and

give him the money. It wasnae like a so-called pimp really but now when I look back... really in a way I was using him for somewhere to live but as well he was using me for his drug habit to be fed.

I was mainly out on the street. I have got experience of working indoors and it was a man who was driving about and he was telling me "You could go and work in a brothel." I'd actually went to the brothel but I didn't like it because you had to spend more time with whoever the punter was whereas out in the street it was very fast. In the brothel it was more intimate so I just... I didnae want to do that. I didnae like it.

I knew it was illegal to be out there but at the time you don't really care, you're thinking about drugs. I was convicted of soliciting on a number of occasions. The money I got to pay the fine was from prostitution, I would be back on the streets that day. Straight after court.

A fine's not gonna stop you from doing it. That was my only income: prostitution. I had to do it. At the time it didn't really mean anything to me, but obviously the repercussions of it now is affecting me, because I'm trying to move on with my life. If I want to get a job in the future, anything, it will be there.

I used to see the police when I was out on the streets. You were aware of them driving by, walking on foot, you would see them. I would really deliberately try and avoid them. I would turn the other way, walk around the building, and just really try to avoid them as much as possible. They didn't treat you bad, you know what I mean? But it was very business-like... you were just going to jail. There wasn't any getting to know you, talking to you, it was just – you were just going to jail and that was it. You wouldn't tell then something's happened to you, when you were soliciting yourself in the first place. You didn't want to be jailed.

I saw lots crimes being committed on other girls that was out on the street. It was quite a regular thing really. There's quite a lot of violence: girls being beaten up, girls being robbed, girls that had just been raped. I mean it really was a regular occurrence.

A few things did happen to me, but there was one...

I was out, and a young boy approached me, he was maybe 19, 20. He never had a car, so we went to a place that he had picked. This place, you wouldn't have known it was there, you would just walk by it. We went in and he was acting very nervous. I was feeling that he was wasting my time. As I went to leave, he offered me money for my bra. Now I know that might seem quite strange but it's not an uncommon thing to happen. I gave him my bra, and he gave me the money. From that second he just turned on me, putting the bra around my neck and really viciously beating me and strangling me.

I was fighting for my life with him. I really was fighting for my life. This was actually during the day, at lunchtime during the day in a residential area. There was a young couple walking by with a pram, they had obviously heard the commotion in the bushes and came to see. I managed to get away from him, I got up and ran away from him. I had the bra tight around my neck. It was so tight I couldn't actually remove it. I had to cut it off my neck when I managed to get home.

I reported it to the police, I phoned 101 and just remained anonymous. I wasn't reporting it for myself. I actually reported it because I was scared for other woman. I felt that he knew what he was doing, and he was very, very violent. The young couple that seen what happened, seen me fleeing the scene, and were very, very concerned. They called 999. The

police found me. They came out to see me and they were very nice about it, very understanding about it.

I had other attacks too. There's quite a lot of violence, because I think men think they're buying your silence. The way prostitution is in society, men know that the women are not going to go to the police, so they can turn very violent very easily on you. There was a time that I was raped and I was beaten pretty badly and I literally went and washed my face and went back to work again because I never had enough money to leave for my drugs.

There's no really a typical punter, you know what I mean? It spans from young boys right up to old men. It doesn't matter if you're poor, working class or rich. It's from all spectrums from everywhere. It's your father to your brother to your husband.

Your average money would be about £20-25, usually for oral sex. They would pick you up, you would go somewhere that you were probably familiar with and where you wouldn't get caught by the police.

Not that you felt safe! You just didn't get caught by the police.

You also got men who are coming out of pubs and whatnot and you would go to alleys or the river, places like that. A lot of them when you get in the car they'll not want to discuss it there but discuss it when you're away from the city centre. They'd usually take you to industrial estates late on at night, that was the most popular. Quite isolated roads, empty car parks... that was the most common places you would go. You would go there, do what you had to do and then hopefully you would get a run back.

You've not got transport to go back so you have to kinda accept whatever money they're actually gonna give you. Once you accept that money you're really theirs to do whatever they like with you. You're kind of caught because you can't just leave. Even though you've done it, you still have to please them to actually get back to where they picked you up from. Sometimes you wouldn't get a run back and they would ask you to leave or start trying to fight with you. Then you had to walk back.

I never had any regulars because I couldn't put my whole soul into it. I couldn't do it. The punters, they don't see the women as people. I think if you were kinda cut off from your waist I don't think it would really make a difference. You're a thing. You're not a human being.

It's so sad because with girls out on the street, the younger you look the better... it is so sad but that is what men are wanting. They're wanting younger girls and because of drugs and what's being fed to them, the punters have got it on a plate. I think they're abusers. Narcissistic... I just don't really think too highly of them at all.

I think you go into it quite naive and you soon learn not to let your guard down and to expect the unexpected. I don't think there's really a time that you feel 100% safe.

Never 100% safe with somebody that you don't know. It's through different things that happen you kinda get that resilience in you, to expect the unexpected. You really have to build up a front to be able to show you can handle yourself, even if you can't. You still have to show that you can and if that doesn't really go with your makeup, you'll be targeted. There's people out there who prey on you. You can never trust anybody in that situation, just can't trust anybody.

I mean it wasnae unusual to be somewhere and you see a girl that's getting out a car that's just been raped or beaten, robbed. Out on the street you see that happening as well. It was quite a regular thing that happened.

When I look back it is a terrible situation but it's something you just canny get involved in, because you're bringing yourself in to be a target as well. You kinda lost your human compassion for people, you just have to kind of cut yourself off and protect yourself really.

People used to stop in cars shouting things, throw things at you. They used to think it was funny. You wish that the ground could open up and swallow you. You don't want to but you become quite hardened to it, always ready to jump into something, ready to fight, ready to argue.

You're always just waiting for something to kick off or something to happen. If you're going somewhere, you kid on you're on a mobile phone to somebody else. Wave to somebody that you don't even know when you're in a car or when you're leaving, shout a male name so that they think there's a male waiting for you.

Quite a lot of the time I did take a knife with me, or a biro pen, that was good as well. I was very very skinny, very emaciated. I couldnae stand up to a man so I used to carry a pen with me. I ended up getting the pen took off me by a punter and he stabbed me. You soon quickly learn that you've no really got any means of protection.

You have to just take the abuse. That's the only way to deal with it, is just to take the abuse.

A number of times I've been attacked by men and also sexual attacks as well. I just never ever reported them. I just felt that, for starters I wouldn't be believed, because I was soliciting myself and also because I was a drug addict. Reporting it is not something that really comes into your mind, you just want to forget about it and you can't be dwelling on anything... you don't want to spend any more time on it, because you have to put it behind you and forget about it. You just have to get on with things but know in future it's going to come back to haunt you.

Girls aren't out there because they like sex. They're not out there because they're nymphomaniacs. They're out there because they're in a situation they have to be there, nobody's there by choice. I've never met a girl that's there by choice, who really wants to be there, really wants to be doing that. There's usually a lot behind why that person's there. This person hasnae come from a brilliant house, has loads of money and decides to come down there and stand to sell theirself. I mean you're selling your body to somebody to do what they like with it.

It's situations that have taken people there. It's not a choice. It's just drastic. It's such a horrible, horrible thing to be involved in. It brings you down so, so much. It's horrendous. There's no any good parts to it at all. There's really no. There's nothing positive about it at all. There's so much negative and no positive. It's degrading. There's nothing that you can gain from it. There's so much you can lose and nothing you can gain.

It's no a job like any other. The girls out there are victims and they're usually victims of a lot of stuff that you don't know about. You have to look behind that to see what's behind that. There's so much that goes with it.

So much emotional stuff, so much abuse.

There's nothing enjoyable, nothing you would get out of it that you would get out of a job... satisfaction... There's nothing like that out there. Most women that are raped once in their life it's a tragedy but girls out on the street, they can be raped a number of times.

I mean it's really soul destroying. There's so much that it takes away from you and it changes you, your personality, and your looks, your everything. You're opening yourself up to be victims. They might put a front on but they're victims. I put that mask on, I felt that I had to do it. You go into survival mode and you do what you have to do to survive.

When I was about 21, I still looked very young and one man took me out and he says "You're far too young" and actually drove me back. That was the only ever bit of kindness I was ever shown out on the streets. That was it.

Nothing else ever happened that was nice or anything like that.

I would make it against the law right across the board because as I say there's no good in it. Everything is a negative. I would eradicate it.

There has been a lot of changes, years ago punters never used to get stopped by the police, it was always the girls. The punters have been getting stopped and their cars looked at. I think that is a really good thing. I know everybody wouldn't agree but if the men weren't there looking the women wouldn't be there. If you stop a man who's got a job, who's got a family, they're going to get into a lot more trouble than what the girl is gonnae. I think that's the way to target it, target it through the men.

I think those Punter John Schools would be a really good thing, a mandatory thing if you get caught. I saw a programme on it – you'd see it from their arrest right through to the end and their attitude's actually changed.

They have speakers, women who have been involved in prostitution. I think really seeing a human being instead of a sexual object and learning about the women. I think that's really the biggest benefit to it. When you take that away from the punters, they have to see the girl as a person... what she's really doing and I think it makes a big difference.

I met one police officer. She had me in the car, taking me to jail. She was different. I just feel that she treated me like a human. She spoke to me, asked me "why are you doing this? What do you think could help you?" She told me about a diversion programme running. She was going to put my name forward for it, I wasn't aware of anything like that. It was just you get jailed and you were fined before that.

So the diversion program really, really turned my life around. It was great support for that.

What I would say to the police officer that I spoke to, I would say thank you to her. Just for taking that wee bit of time to talk to me as an individual. To take a wee bit of interest in me. She actually said to me that she had faith in me, that I could overcome this. At that time it never really meant much to me, but now looking back, just they few wee kind words made such a big difference. It's made such a big difference to me.

I think the police here have a big role to play for women in prostitution. Sometimes they could be the only people you've spoke to except for punters that whole day. They need to treat the person as a human being, to see them as a victim, and not as just committing a crime. I don't think they should go in with such a hard approach, I think it has to be a more gentle approach, a more human approach. I think there'd be great benefits from that. I think

the girl would be a lot more relaxed, be able to approach the police a lot more, have more faith in the police, trust. It would make you look at the police differently.

I mean you could more trust in them, be able to report things, feel more comfortable round about them and you're not running away from them. I think that you would catch a lot more criminals.

I think it's important for women to be able to report crimes, because there's people out there committing crimes and they're not being punished for it. The woman has to realise that she shouldn't be treated in that way. She should be treated as a human being, not treated as piece of meat. I feel that's the way a lot of girls are treated. Inhuman.

I think you have to remember that when you're out on the street and that you've not got anybody, if there is somebody he's usually looking for something off you. It's very hard to learn to trust people.

In the diversion program it was really getting to know your worker as well, I mean, that can take a wee bit of time. I think it made such a big difference in helping me to get out of prostitution, and helping me with my drug addiction. They're such a big, important part of what you need at that time. The program helped me so much. It gave me so much more confidence in myself... the support was really good as well. It just gave me so much confidence, positivity.

I've been out of prostitution for a couple of years now.

Well, really I feel the last year and a half I've just started my life. My life changed dramatically. It's so different, I feel so much more confident. Positive things have been happening to me. I'm looking forward to the future, getting to know myself – that's been a journey, getting to know what I like.

I want to stay on with my education and then hopefully have a career, working with women at the end of it. Something that actually I could get enjoyment and take things out of. I want my own house, to have my daughter back and really just to know myself and to be settled in my life.

A WEEK OF MALE VIOLENCE

Kirsty Strickland

CommonSpace

8 September 2017

CommonSpace columnist Kirsty Strickland takes a look at just a single week's worth of media coverage on violence against women.

I OFTEN wonder what a feminist newspaper would look like. Not a newspaper for women, with a target audience of only women, but a traditional newspaper which boasted truly feminist credentials in terms of its structure, reporting and coverage.

There would be obvious yet relatively minor differences. Women's sport would be included on parity with the men's. Women in politics would be robustly scrutinised, but for the policies

rather than their clothes or reproductive decisions. Female expertise would be included unlike, for example, the 85 per cent of male academics that we currently see quoted.

There would be no up-skirt photos of celebrities, and scantily clad women wouldn't be used to decorate the pages. Right now in Scotland there aren't any female editors of major newspapers - a feminist newspaper would surely buck that trend.

Perhaps the most marked difference we would see in our hypothetical feminist newspaper would be in how violence against women and girls is reported. Among our main newspapers this is an area which has proved problematic and hasn't been reliably reported with care across the board.

We have seen some progress, however. The National partnered with Zero Tolerance's Write To End Violence Against Women awards in 2015, and supported the aims set out in their Handle With Care guide as to how media should report violence against women. The Sunday Herald was partner of the scheme in 2016.

Most newspapers have made strides in the last decade, but given that we still see damaging and sexist reporting fill the pages, some clearly haven't gone far enough.

The Daily Record came under fire on social media recently for its headline 'Rogue Romeo' on a story about a violent man who punched his girlfriend in the face after she turned down his marriage proposal. Not surprisingly, the marriage proposal was the focus of the story, rather than the violent attack.

After the backlash, the Daily Record replaced 'Rogue Romeo' with 'thug'. They didn't, however, make any amendments to the reporting of the incident, which was fraught with unnecessary, victim-blaming details and the kind of skewed focus that we regularly see when newspapers report violence against women.

Violence against women in Scotland is widespread and, too often, there is not enough context or care put into the reporting. The societal impact of male violence and the scale of the problem is often omitted entirely.

I recently submitted a Freedom of Information request to Police Scotland, which showed that so far this year there have been nine instances of a female being the victim of homicide where a male was the perpetrator.

A quick look back at the week's news shows that violence against women and girls in Scotland is truly endemic in its scale.

In the past seven days alone we have seen reports of: two men convicted of assaulting and raping a 19-year-old woman in Invergordon; a male manager of a Home Bargains found guilty of a series of sexual assaults of employees in several stores; a 27-year-old man detained on suspicion of a serious sexual offence, after an incident at Glasgow Central train station; a 66-year-old man found guilty of sexual assault after grabbing a 15-year-old schoolgirl's chest on a bus; a 64-year-old paedophile jailed for 10 years, after 110,000 images of child abuse were found on his computer - he was found guilty of abusing 12 girls between 1991-2015, the youngest of whom was six years old; a man was jailed for two-and-a-half years after attacking a woman in her own home, leaving her with black eyes and broken ribs; and a former school bus conductor jailed for secretly filming schoolgirls out in public, as well as possessing images of child sexual abuse.

This list is not exhaustive. Last week wasn't exceptional for instances of male violence or court cases relating to it. This is the reality of Scotland in 2017.

Of course, while tempting to wish for, a feminist daily newspaper isn't likely to materialise any time soon. Our newspaper industry in Scotland faces challenges of falling readership and financial pressures. Though at times it may not seem like it, reform of the current offering - in terms of the portrayal of women and responsible reporting of the issues that affect us – is a far more achievable goal.

A welcome first step would be for all newspaper editors in Scotland to commit to ensuring that their journalists and reporters read and utilise the comprehensive Handle With Care guide that Zero Tolerance created to give a better understanding of what responsible reporting of violence against women looks like.

In its guide, Zero Tolerance recognises that even well-intentioned journalists can sometimes get it wrong - not through malice or indifference, but because of the time constraints and the pressurised nature of their work.

That's why it's so important to make use of the wealth of experts we have in Scotland, from groups like Engender, Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland. Because often, the path to making progress and effecting real change starts with something as simple as deciding it is at least worthwhile to try.



Best Article – Student and Young Person

PHILIP DAVIES FAILS US AS AN MP BY IGNORING COMPLEX POWER STRUCTURES

Clea Skopeliti

The Student

17 December 2016

Philip Davies, the newly elected member to the Women and Equalities Committee, is an anti-feminist who believes that the committee should never have been set up. Yesterday, he spent 78 minutes arguing against the Istanbul Convention Bill, a bill to fight violence against women and domestic violence, claiming that it would be harmful to men. This is Tory Britain.

This should not have been a controversial bill. The bill stated that “it shall be the duty of Her Majesty’s Government to take all reasonable steps as soon as reasonably possible to become compliant with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.” The latter category – domestic violence – covers both men and women. Davies was so keen to derail a bill that protects women that he was willing to ignore that it included to men too.

But domestic violence is a gendered issue. There is a statistic going around citing one third of domestic violence victims as being men. This is a gross overestimation – this statistic is a measurement of fatal domestic violence (largely skewed because women are more likely to use a weapon.) Domestic violence that results in homicide happens in a minority of cases. This statistic hides the vast majority of domestic violence cases, which are non-fatal and repeated – when these cases are examined, 92% of the perpetrators are male, and 83% of the victims are female. This does not in any way mean that male victims are less important or should be ignored, and there is definite stigma against male victims in particular, meaning that there are likely to be more men who don’t come forward. But pretending that a problem isn’t gendered won’t help us understand why domestic violence happens on the scale that it does. Male victims are still less statistically prevalent, and filibustering a bill to protect women doesn’t make you supportive of male victims: it means you are the kind of person who uses them only as a counterpoint when women’s issues are being discussed. And frankly, there is too much of that going around.

If you only bring up male victims of domestic violence to score points in a debate against women’s issues, you are not supportive of male victims. You are using them as pawns to rail against women. This is evident in Philip Davies’ speech: he does not really care about men having better protection against domestic violence, he just wants to stop women getting it. If you are actually dedicated to helping male victims, then you take positive action – you don’t try to shut women out. Not to mention that it is often feminists who speak out for male victims; in fact, domestic violence became a social issue because of feminist activism in the 1980s. The stigma around male victims of domestic violence is an issue bolstered by a patriarchal society that deems physical strength and dominance to be male characteristics, rendering victims as weak and unworthy.

Should we be surprised by Davies’ filibustering though? This is the same man who has filibustered bills to give carers free hospital parking and a bill to prevent landlords from evicting tenants for asking for necessary repairs. This is the man who said that same sex marriage discriminates against straight people, that BBC diversity targets are racist, that disabled people should work for less pay. Apart from his obvious misogyny, this instance of filibustering is just another instance of an extremely privileged man being too far removed from the playing field to see how full of potholes it remains.

If, like Davies, you feel like the world is skewed against men, against white people, against straight people, or able-bodied people then you are in dire need of perspective. Regardless of whether people are starting to get more progressive (and 2016's political landscape would suggest the opposite) the majority of the world remains a long way from progressive. The world, overwhelmingly, is not governed by political correctness gone mad or anywhere near it; the dominant force of male and pale is far from diminished. Social movements and policies – from Black Lives Matter to the BBC taking positive action to diversify TV – are not an attack on white people. This view rests on a flawed assumption that naively sees society as a lot more equal than it is, that understands discrimination as being simply rooted in individuals rather than systems. It assumes the status quo has occurred naturally. That so many TV shows have all white casts has just happened naturally, and so taking positive action to diversify is contrived. It is a simplistic, limited view of how oppression functions. Women being paid less doesn't just happen; people of colour don't just happen to get overwhelmingly stopped and searched; trans actors don't just happen to not get cast.

Oppression is systemic and operates on many levels. Philip Davies refusing to acknowledge its manifestations doesn't surprise me, but it does sadden me a great deal.

DOMESTIC ABUSE IS HAPPENING AT UNIVERSITY SO WHY DON'T WE TALK ABOUT IT?

Niamh Anderson and Polly Smythe

The Student

11 March 2017

Content warning: domestic abuse, domestic violence, discrimination, sexual assault and rape

It is an all too familiar scenario. There are friends over for pre drinks, Beyoncé is playing, everyone is looking fly. Someone takes a photo of the #squad and goes to upload it on Facebook, but a friend asks them not to. "My boyfriend doesn't know I'm out/ my boyfriend doesn't like it when I wear this top/my boyfriend wouldn't like it if he knew I was drinking," they nervously laugh, and offer instead to take another group photo. After some brief awkwardness, the night resumes and the moment is forgotten.

Domestic abuse is happening at university. It is happening in our halls of residence, in our tutorials, in our nightclubs. So why are we so reluctant to talk about it? Domestic abuse knows no boundaries of class, age, race or gender, but as a society we do not see students and young people as domestic abuse victims, despite women aged 16 – 24 being the group at the highest risk of experiencing domestic abuse. Women's Aid defines domestic abuse as "an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence." It is perpetrated "in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner" and in the vast majority of cases "it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men".

When we think about domestic abuse, the image that comes to most of us is of an older woman, married and with children. We do not think about two university students in their early twenties. Why is this a problem? By continuing to perpetuate the stereotype that young women do not experience abusive relationships, we prevent them from getting the help they need. Speaking to The Guardian, Neil Blacklock from Respect commented that young people "come to us and ask if their relationship is normal," as "they feel uncomfortable, but find it difficult to

name as abuse.” Sexpression Edinburgh, a charity providing fact-based, sex-positive, body-positive and inclusive sex and relationship education, told us “people arrive at university not feeling confident to recognise abuse in their own relationships or knowing how to talk to friends about it”. If you do not see yourself as a victim, then you are less likely to seek assistance.

We spoke to Dr Marsha Scott, from Scottish Women’s Aid, who emphasised that “Scotland (and elsewhere) continues to suffer from stereotyped notions about who experiences domestic abuse and what that experience looks like. Every woman is at risk, not because of any characteristics of her own but because of the high prevalence of perpetrators of domestic abuse... abuse is possibly physical but always psychological, always involving control, coercion, and fear.”

This reluctance to label relationships as coercive, manipulative or abusive is by no means an exclusively university phenomena. However, university students are supposedly famed for their #wokeness. Both on campus and nationally there has been an increasing emphasis on tackling sexual assault and rape, making the absence of discourse around abuse all the more noticeable. Edinburgh University Student’s Association have run several very successful campaigns, such as this year’s No One Asks For It, and the Consent Campaign, with slogans ranging from “The way I dress is not a yes” to “You can’t always get what you want”. Sexual assault on campus is clearly rife; NUS research shows that in 2010 68% of women students had experienced verbal or physical assault, and so these campaigns are vital.

Sexual harassment and domestic abuse are clearly related; they are both on a spectrum of violence against women, but they are not the same. A campaign to end one might open up discourse around the other, but there are clear limitations. The new bystander training being promoted under the university’s No One Asks For It campaign is a fantastic initiative, but would require there to be a bystander present at moments of abuse to be applicable in the context of a relationship. More initiatives focused directly on the red flags of domestic abuse, where to go and who to tell would help tackle the issue. Sexpression Edinburgh noted that “education is so important, but there also needs to be a big shift in cultural portrayals of relationships”, citing both Gilmore Girls and Beauty and the Beast as examples of romanticised unhealthy relationships.

It can be easier to focus on tackling sexual harassment for a multitude of reasons. The dominant image of sexual assault and harassment is often, although not always, something that is perpetrated by a stranger in a public space. Ongoing emotional and psychological abuse can be hard to identify, making it difficult to call out. Victims can still be in love with their abusers, making conversations about the abuse more complicated. Abusers often isolate their partner from friends and family, making it harder to reach out to a friend you are concerned about. It is one thing to shout at someone in the street for catcalling your friend, but it is another to call their partner abusive.

Not only are there misconceptions about who can experience domestic abuse, but misconceptions about what that abuse looks like. Women’s Liberation Officer Chris Belous told us that recognition tends to be for the more “obvious signs of abusive, violent relationships, while other things like emotional abuse and gaslighting go unnoticed”. When talking about domestically abusive relationships, so often the first question asked is ‘did they hit you?’. Not only does this significantly downplay the catastrophic effects emotional abuse can have, but makes victims less likely to come forward as they do not feel their relationship is abusive if there is no violence.

Domestic abuse is not experienced in a monolithic way. For couples in non heterosexual relationships, there can be an extra layer of stigma attached. University is a space where young people, away from home, often feel freer to explore their sexuality. This creates further

issues. If nobody knows that you're not straight, how can you talk about the abuse in your relationship? For people with disabilities, changing accommodation to escape an abusive relationship can be harder if your flat has been adapted to meet specialist requirements. Women of colour and transgender people face the fear of racism and transphobia when reporting their abuse. Men are victims of domestic violence, both in heterosexual and homosexual relationships, but feel unable to speak out about it, for worry of not being believed or for being deemed 'not manly'. An important part of opening the discussion is remembering that any relationship can be abusive; a romantic relationship, a sexual one, a family one or a friendship. The validity of someone's experience is not lessened because it isn't part of mainstream abuse discourse.

Chris Belous commented that "it's all too easy to say well, why don't you just leave, or cut them [the abuser] out, but there can be lots of barriers to a person being able to do that straight away". The university context creates additional barriers to escaping abusive relationships. For most university is the first time living away from home. This can leave students without a support network in place. When there are so many new experiences and new people, it can be hard to find someone who you trust to confide in. Being away from home, it is easier to retreat into your student accommodation unnoticed. All of this contributes to isolation and often an escalation of abusive behaviours.

However, a university environment can be a supportive atmosphere. The Advice Place is a highly useful place to register concerns as a friend, flatmate, or as a victim of violent or emotional abuse. They offer advice on reporting to the police, anonymous reporting, practical advice on keeping safe as well as university specific advice on complaints or special circumstances.

If you are concerned about your own safety or that of a friend, the Scottish Women's Aid helpline is free to call, and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on 0800 027 1234.

CHED EVANS' ACQUITTAL SHOWS LACK OF PROGRESS IN SOCIAL RESPONSE TO RAPE

Rachel Joint

The Student

18 October 2016

Content warning: rape, victim-blaming

After a two week retrial, Ched Evans was acquitted of the rape of a 19-year-old woman. This verdict, and the process through which it was reached, was steeped in fundamental falsehoods regarding rape, consent and women's sexuality. The legal consequences remain to be seen, but the societal importance of this development cannot be understated.

The most shocking aspect of this retrial was the decision to allow the victim's past sexual partners to describe, in detail, their sexual encounters. Consider the emotional impact of this for the victim. Imagine the trauma of having your sexual history scrutinised in order to disprove your testimony that your autonomy was ignored, your body taken advantage of, and your right to safety when in a position of vulnerability rejected. Consider also the precedent of using a woman's sexual history to invalidate her rape claim for rape survivors, women, and wider society.

It means that a woman who unashamedly enjoys sex will always have to second-guess herself. She will have to live with the fear of that enjoyment being held against her should she ever be one of the 85,000 women in England and Wales who report being raped every year. It means that we, as a society, are still so uncomfortable with the fact that women can be sexual beings that we use their sexuality as a weapon against them.

I yearn for the day we realise that rape has nothing to do with sexuality. It has nothing to do with sex. Rape is all about power and its exertion over other human beings. Rape is not about sex. Recognising this, we might then see how ludicrous it is to connect someone's consensual sexual experiences with their experience of rape.

To persist with this connection shows a deep-rooted ignorance of what consent itself is. Consent is always retractable. Consensual sex with a specific person does not mean that all future activity with that person is automatically consensual. Consenting to a specific sexual position with one person does not mean that you always consent to that position. Being sexually active around the time of a rape does not disprove that rape. Consent for one is not consent for all.

It is extremely unnerving to witness a judge and a jury making this fundamental mistake. It reflects the institutional heights that our collective ignorance has reached. It creates a toxic feedback loop to the everyday prejudice and misogyny to which this case is intrinsically linked. It reinforces the idea that a woman's body is never entirely hers, especially if she should choose to express herself sexually. It solidifies the lie that a sexually active woman has given up her right to bodily autonomy, especially when faced with a man with money and status.

This lie is pervasive. Evans presumed his status made him sexually attractive, as outlined in his police interview: "Footballers are rich [...] that's what girls like." While Evans defends himself using the supposed magnetism of rich men, another rich man, Donald Trump, uses the same idea to boast about sexual assault: "When you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything."

The development of this case suggests to victims everywhere that they cannot expect their accounts to be welcomed without ensuing character assassination. They cannot trust the justice system to hear their voices without persistently searching for a reason not to listen. Our society still has not learned how to take rape and sexual assault seriously, and, until it does, it will always be failing its victims.

INSIDE THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A CULTURE OF HARASSMENT?

Richard Joseph, with Meilan Solly and Jonathon Skavroneck

The Saint

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Editor's note: This semester, The Saint conducted a substantial two-month investigation into the culture of exploitation and harassment in St Andrews' hospitality industry. Our article includes quotes from eight student sources, some of whom were willing to be named. However, to protect these sources' identities and act in fairness to both sides, we have decided to anonymise all individuals and establishments.

"I cried pretty much on every shift, sometimes two or three occasions a night," Jessica said. "I'm not a person who gives up really easily, but at that point I just thought it was time to leave. One night, I just burst into tears. I said I can't do this anymore, and I'm leaving."

Jessica spent a year working at a prominent restaurant/bar in St Andrews. During this period, she experienced sexual harassment from customers and alleges her managers took no action despite being aware of the inappropriate behaviour.

Jessica is not alone in feeling mistreated. The following testimonies are based on interviews with waitstaff, hostesses, and bartenders around St Andrews. They signify a pattern of worker exploitation that targets, in particular, young female students working part-time.

In the UK, sexual harassment is defined as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which “violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded, or humiliated, or creates a hostile or offensive environment.” This can include sexual comments or jokes.

Another student, Kate, worked at the same restaurant/bar as Jessica for over a year.

“Working at a bar, you kind of expect a certain degree of harassment,” she said. “But I mean, even if that’s what I expect, I’m never going to take any of it. I have been slapped on the ass, told inappropriate things, and spoken to in inappropriate ways. There was an instance where [my manager] told me to get over it one day, which really upset me.”

Jessica preferred not to go into specifics but confirmed that she was consistently harassed by customers. Often, managers witnessed this harassment but chose to ignore both the customers’ behaviour and Jessica’s complaints.

“When I was there, [the work culture] was very negative,” Alice, who was a hostess at the same restaurant/bar, said. “I think it was quite a toxic environment. [...] There was a lot of harassment, pretty much across all boards.”

According to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, employees over 18 who work more than six hours a day are entitled to “an uninterrupted rest break of at least twenty minutes.”

But Alice noted that she would often work nine-hour shifts without her legally mandated rest break. During this time, she experienced sexual harassment “almost every shift.”

One day, Alice was working an evening shift and serving a table of rugby players. Her co-worker walked out about an hour into the shift, disgusted by the players’ actions, but Alice stayed behind.

An employee who witnessed the incident recalled Alice being “handed about like a ragdoll between them. It was horrible, just watching her.”

“We were so harassed by these guys, [...] just these rugby boys and their coaches,” Alice said. “I had guys touching my ass and making very crude comments to the point where one of the managers actually saw one of these guys inappropriately touching me.”

“I was staring right at [my manager],” she continued. “We made eye contact, [and] he saw this guy touch me. And he just turned around and walked out. I was so shaken up after that.”

Alice also described an instance when she gave several napkins to an older man who had a drink spilled on his trousers. When she asked if she could help with anything else, the drunken patron screamed across the restaurant, “Yeah, you can sit on my lap.”

Shocked, Alice looked around for support and saw her manager. This time, he didn’t walk away. He was laughing.

These incidents stood out for their severity, but they were just several examples, the three employees agree, in a long line-up of similar incidents of sexual harassment and mistreatment.

The three allege that on multiple occasions, management at the restaurant/bar did not actively respond to sexual harassment from patrons. Jessica went to a manager with a complaint and was told it “wasn’t their problem.” Alice, after seeing management’s attitude in action, felt it would be a “waste of time.”

Joel, a former bartender at the restaurant/bar, noted that his overall experience was not a negative one, but “the women were expected to put up with more than they should have.”

Alice’s breaking point came when a manager actually laid his hands on her.

“I was helping out behind the bar, and it was very busy,” she explained. “And one of the managers, [...] he can go from zero to a hundred really quickly. He snapped at me that I was in the way and shoved me. I’m talking a 35-year-old man, shoving me. And I’m quite small. I was so flabbergasted by that. [...] That was my last straw situation, where I was like, okay, this cannot go on any further.”

Employees interviewed recounted interactions with management that were inappropriately sexual in nature. Jessica and Kate both experienced a range of such comments from a lead manager. Certain aspects of the restaurant/bar’s policies, including the dress code for female employees, also reflected this culture.

“If they came into work and their skirt was too long, they were sent home to wear a shorter skirt,” Joel said. “If they weren’t wearing enough makeup, they’d be sent home to put more makeup on. If they didn’t have enough cleavage out, [they] would be sent home to [put on] a smaller top.”

In 2016, the Trades Union Congress conducted a survey on sexual harassment in modern workplaces. 52 per cent of women polled had experienced some form of sexual harassment. 28 per cent of women polled were subject to comments of a sexual nature about their body or clothes, and more than one in 10 reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching or attempts to kiss them. One in five reported that their direct manager or another figure of authority was the perpetrator. And four out of five did not report the harassment to their employer.

Lydia House, a spokesperson for the Zero Tolerance charity, which works to end men’s violence against women by promoting gender equality, said that “sexism, harassment, and violence in the workplace are still not taken as seriously as they should be, and women’s complaints are too often dismissed.”

She continued, “This creates a culture which prevents women from coming forward and reporting instances of harassment or abuse. Students, who are often new to the workforce, may be unaware or unsure of their rights, and unfortunately the female students could find themselves particularly vulnerable in the workplace.”

Victimisation is not limited to restaurants. Before Kate was employed at the restaurant/bar, she spent four months working at a different bar in St Andrews. Dana, another student, worked at the same bar for six months. During this time, she experienced the same sort of harassment from customers. Dana noted that when customers behaved inappropriately, her managers would generally find it amusing. She also recalled an incident when a customer grabbed her shirt as she was walking away.

“I was like, you just can’t do that. And the manager thought it was funny. Stuff like that happened all the time, someone touching you on the dance floor,” Dana said. “They never actually did anything about it. They would actually laugh.”

At the beginning of their employment, both Kate and Dana worked “trial shifts” for which they were never paid.

“If the potential employee is being asked to do the job beyond a few hours, then it ceases to be a trial and verges on employment, which must be paid the national minimum wage,” Bryan Simpson, hospitality organiser for Unite Scotland, explained.

Dana’s “trial shift” lasted 12 hours, from 5 pm in the evening to 5 am the next day. Kate’s lasted from 8 pm to 2 am.

The “trial shift” was not the last time Dana and Kate worked without pay. On several occasions, both had to stay until well after closing time.

“After the [bar] closes at 2 am, instead of normal bar practice where we have cleaners come in early in the morning [...], the remaining bar staff would have to clean up at the end of the night,” Kate said. “So I would be there until 4 am, cleaning the whole [...] place, [although] I would get clocked out at 2 am when the bar shut. That was quite common.”

On a regular basis, Kate and Dana were not paid for hours of nightly work after closing — and this work was well outside the purview of bartending. Additionally, they had to work these shifts without pause; neither Kate nor Dana were ever allowed their legally mandated rest break, even when working twelve-hour shifts.

“I worked there for about six months, and I don’t think I ever had a break,” Dana said. “I don’t think anyone did.”

Jane worked in promotions at another prominent venue in St Andrews. She worked front of house, holding menus and speaking to customers as they walked past. A few times, she went to work only to find the restaurant was closed for a private function and nobody had told her.

Once, when Jane showed up to work, she was asked, without prior warning, to visit all the bed and breakfasts in town and distribute promotional materials. One of the establishments was five miles away, but Jane wasn’t allowed to go home and change into more suitable walking shoes. She was told she couldn’t return until she’d delivered all of the materials and eventually returned with blisters. Jane was never paid for the extra hour of walking and quit soon after.

“There’s this mentality in this town,” she said. “Same kind of thing with housing. There are so many students. There are always going to be students wanting jobs, like there are always going to be students willing to pay extortionate rates for housing. And [these establishments] can do whatever they want. They can replace you in a second. They don’t have to make an effort to be good employers.”

Alice expressed a similar sentiment about the restaurant/bar where she was employed.

“They know enough that in a town like St Andrews, and with their reputation, they have no problem going through staff, because they know someone else would just love to work for them,” she said. “From what I’ve seen, what I’ve experienced, [the restaurant/bar] just kind of takes advantage of these individuals until they can’t handle it. They quit. And they just find someone else, within like a day. I remember when I quit, the day after there was already a [help wanted] notice up.”

According to the University of St Andrews' official policy statement, "harassment and bullying of one individual or group in the University community by another" will not be tolerated. But about half of students at St Andrews hold a part-time job. Time spent working is a significant portion of student life, and it is not subject to these safeguards.

What can student employees do to ensure better treatment? ACAS advises first approaching one's manager with a complaint, but this is of no use when the manager is unwilling to take action or the actual perpetrator.

One option is to work only at establishments with a good track record and transparent employment practices. One notable example is the Union bar.

Eileen, who currently works at the Union, said she was paid for her trial shift, receives regular rest breaks, and feels safe on the job (due in part to the active, watchful bouncers).

"I think more establishments should do what the Union does," she said. "We have the right to refuse service to anyone, whatever that reason may be, even if they're just being way too aggressive or incredibly rude."

What the Union has that some businesses lack is an infrastructure that incorporates accountability. It is university-affiliated, run largely by students and for students. The Union has an intermediary with elected representatives — the Students' Association — and a student employee can trust the Association to have their best interests at heart. There is no Students' Association for the restaurants in town, but there is another option: joining a trade union.

Unite Scotland, for example, is the only union in Scotland with a dedicated branch for hospitality workers. The group is launching a Fair Hospitality Charter that seeks to put pressure on companies to adopt policy changes for the benefit of their employees.

"Workers in the hospitality industry are some of the lowest paid and worst treated in the Scottish economy, in terms of holidays, sick pay, and contractual stability," Mr Simpson, the organiser for Better Than Zero and Unite Scotland hospitality, said. "Less than four per cent of hotel and restaurant workers [are] a member of a trade union. We believe these are directly correlated because without a trade union, hospitality workers have very little collective voice [...] to challenge exploitative working practices as well as negotiate for better wages and conditions."

"The most effective way that student workers can improve their pay and conditions is to join a trade union and organise collectively in order to hold their employer to account. The more members a workplace has, the stronger the worker's voice will be, and the more likely it will be listened to by senior management."

Unite is a Glasgow-based group, and thus many workers in Glasgow have a voice and the power of collective bargaining. Here in St Andrews, there are few checks and balances for large, monopolising institutions. Youth membership in unions is miniscule, and joining one can be tricky; if an employee on a zero-hour contract joins a union individually, their employer can easily stop giving them shifts to discourage other employees from doing the same.

Fiona, who worked at the same restaurant/bar as Alice, Jessica, and Kate, recalled issues with her initial contract. The contract she signed promised £6.40 an hour, but when she received her first paycheck, it was £5.33, barely over the national minimum wage.

“I asked [my coworkers], and they said, ‘Oh yeah, they tell you you’re going to get more pay than you actually are,’” Fiona said. “I thought, ‘Should I say something? But I know that a lot of kids in this town want a job, and I feel like they would just fire me if I say something.’”

Employees were also unlikely to earn money from tips. Alice noted that when she worked at the restaurant/bar, 60 per cent of all card tips went straight to management, and the remaining 40 per cent was divided amongst everyone who worked there (including bartenders, waitstaff, kitchen staff, and cleaning staff). This left a miniscule portion for hostesses. In one month, Jessica made £3 in tips compared to a friend who made £80.

“It was putting a lot of emotional stress on me. I hated going to work,” Alice said. “I’d just be there from 5 [pm] to two in the morning working, and then I’d have to wake up for a 9 am class. I just thought, this is not worth it.”

Today, several of these sources work at establishments with better employment practices and generous, above-board payment. Others have given up bar work entirely. But there are many students who accept exploitation as an inherent aspect of St Andrews’ hospitality industry.

“There was just kind of an overarching theme of sexuality, if that makes sense. It was a culture, that’s what it was,” Joel said. “And you had to buy into it. And once you bought into it, you were [...] entrenched. Very much a bubble, like St Andrews.”

The Saint contacted the establishments referenced in this article to offer them their right of reply to the relevant allegations. The restaurant/bar and bar did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The online version of this article will be updated to reflect further updates.



Gender Equality Award 2017: Creative Writing

THE WOMAN I DO NOT KNOW

Lorna Hill

There's a woman in my bed I do not know. She lies there, her complexion creamy and her dark roots stark against the white pillow. My pillow. She's wearing a strappy negligee, definitely not mine, and her hands are clasped at her stomach. That's not your bed, I tell her. Or your lamp or your books. Those are not your things, I say. Yet still she sleeps. I open my wardrobe and the smell hits me. It's cloying and sickly, a perfume I do not know. Neither do I recognise the silky blouses and fluffy sweaters hanging in neat rows. These are not my clothes, I say. Walking to the window, I glance out into the garden. The purple flowering bush has been trimmed, the garden path is no longer mossy. I turn to stare at the woman in my bed. Did you do that, I say. Did you take over from me? I wonder if I should climb in beside her, squeeze her hand or whisper in her ear. Or should I throw back the covers and yell at her to go? Leave now, get out of my bed. Tiptoeing over until I'm so very close, I bend down until my lips are touching her forehead. She smells of cherries and vanilla. I yank the duvet away from her and she sighs gently, rolling onto her side. Flicking my gaze down her body I gasp then gently pull the cover up over her, taking my time to carefully tuck her in. Then I sit on the bed beside her and wait.

My mother always told me that a nice cup of tea was the answer to everything. She didn't want to listen when I tried to tell her my problems. I longed to share my secret with her even though I knew it was risky. But surely, she could help. Wouldn't she want to help? I had little to say so instead would listen to her talk about the neighbour's cousin who had run off with his best friend's wife, or a lady at the church who was dying and wasn't very nice. She would talk about everyone else and their distant relatives or friends I didn't know. As long as we didn't have to talk about me. As soon as there was silence, which could have allowed me the chance to start talking, she would leap from her seat and say, I'll put the kettle on shall I? Make us a nice cup of tea. I didn't even like tea but I watched as she disappeared into the dark hallway, listened to the whoosh of the water at the sink and the slam of the kettle. It was only a matter of time before the radio went on. Yes, there it was. The sound of Classic FM. Soothing her, silencing me. I wondered if she already knew, could she tell? I had tried so many different tactics on different days. Yet the outcome was always the same. She may as well have put her fingers in her ears and sung, Lalalalalala. Perhaps things would have been different if my father was still alive. But he died when I was three.

The woman I do not know looks nothing like me. She is beautiful, with her pale skin and unkempt hair. She has a dusting of freckles across her nose. A foot pokes out from beneath the covers and I see her toenails, carefully painted a dark red. Sexy or slutty, I ask? I run a finger along the top of the headboard, removing a thick pile of dust. Standards are slipping, I say. I would never have let things get that bad. But then if she is sexy and slutty she won't have time to be a housekeeper too. Perhaps that is where I went wrong. Maybe I should have smeared lipstick across my mouth and painted my toes a vivid red. I am jealous of you, I say. You've got what I had, I say. I hope you manage to keep it. Still she sleeps as I sit there watching. I know I must look foolish, perched on the edge of the bed I used to lie in. But I no longer care.

I was fourteen when my mother told me the truth about my dad. She was in the kitchen cooking tea. It must have been a Friday because we were having haddock from the fishmonger who drove into our street and blared his horn. I noticed the way she always brushed her hair, before she grabbed her purse and ran out to his van. Then she would return, two pink spots high on her cheekbones, a glimmer of something in her eyes. She slapped the white fish in a huge bowl with beaten eggs and milk, then dropped it onto a plate of bright, orange breadcrumbs before it went into the frying pan. Do you miss dad, I asked,

as I set the table. She bent over to check the chips in the oven. Mum used to make them from scratch, until she discovered the ones you could buy in Asda. Do you miss dad, I said again. This time louder. She wouldn't turn and look at me. I walked towards the cupboard to get the ketchup. But I could feel the start of flutters in my chest. Had I said something wrong? Was she deaf? I placed a hand on her shoulder but she jerked away. What is it mum, I said. Glancing at me, her lips in a firm line, she shook her head. No, she said. Not one bit. Oh, I said, the air escaping me like a deflating balloon. Your dad was not a good man, she said. The glimmer in her eyes had gone. Then the timer for the chips went off.

I wonder what the woman I do not know is called. Is she a Jackie or a Susie or a Margaret? I look at the bedside table hoping it may offer me a clue. There is nothing except for a lamp and a silver bracelet. It is not mine. I pull open a drawer expecting to see my jewellery and books. They are gone. In their place is a hairbrush and a comb. These are not my things, I say. Where are my things? I look under the bed, expecting to see my cardboard box of stuff. Old magazines and pictures and shoes. But it has gone. Where is my box, I say. Still she sleeps. I sit and I wait. Then the woman in my bed opens her eyes, throws back the covers and stands up to stretch. Pulling on her dressing gown, she tiptoes out of the room and I follow. I wait outside the bathroom as she pees and washes her face. Then I follow her downstairs into the kitchen. She pauses on the bottom step and looks behind, straight at me.

When I left home a year ago I didn't look back. I let Storm Gertrude buffet me along to the station. The rain slashed at me, like icy needles, but I didn't feel a thing. Scanning the notice board I saw the next train to London departed in five minutes. Platform nine. Normally I might have stopped to buy a glossy magazine which showed me designer dresses, sex techniques I should master and how to apply eye makeup for the smoky look. Which was ironic as my shades were usually greys and blues, occasionally yellow. I was already on trend without even trying. A steaming cup of coffee to warm my body would have been nice, but it just wasn't practical. Jumping onto the carriage, I sank down into a seat. Warm, dry and safe. Then I saw the first-class logo, telling me that I didn't deserve to be there. This was the carriage for the cans of the world. Not the cants, like me. I shrugged and smiled and stayed put. The train began easing itself slowly along the tracks and I listened as the guard made an announcement in his clipped Eastern European accent. There were likely to be delays, he said, because of the storm. His voice was apologetic, sad. It's okay, I wanted to tell him. These things happen. The storm is not your fault. The man across the aisle jabbed furiously at his phone. A woman next to him tore open a sachet of sugar with her teeth and poured it into her cardboard cup of tea. She repeated again and again, finally taking a slurp. I turned to stare out the window and watched as the navy blue sky gradually turned pink, then into a smudged blue.

I follow the woman I do not know into my kitchen. She fills the kettle and switches it on. Then she reaches into my cupboard for a mug, the red mug with white hearts. That's my mug, I say. She doesn't listen. She's humming as she pours the water into the cup, then quickly lets the teabag kiss the water before throwing it into the sink. I wouldn't leave that there, I say. Reaching out, I stroke her bump. She gazes at it, putting her hand on top of mine. It's a girl, I say. You are having a girl. The woman, Susie or Jackie or Margaret, clutches her mug and stares out of the window. You look worried, I say. Your shoulders are tense. Here, I say, reaching out to touch her. It's okay. She sighs, takes a sip of her tea and gazes out to the garden.

On the train I did not speak to anyone, instead rested my forehead against the window and watched the stark trees bending in the wind, the muddy fields and the birds swooping through the puddles. The guard announced that because of the delay all the passengers could have free Wifi. You can have free snacks and drinks from the bar, he said. There was a stampede as men and women and children rushed to and from the food trolley, with their

red paper bags filled with slabs of fruit cake, shortbread biscuits, sandwiches. Their podgy fingers, grasped cups of tea and coffee. The train is going to be eighty minutes late, said the guard. You are entitled to compensation, he said. I didn't mind though. How could you be compensated for a storm? Strong winds were nobody's fault. The sun began to shine at Newcastle. I smiled as I looked down at my lap and my ragged, chewed nails.

I follow the woman I do not know as she goes back upstairs and into my bedroom. I watch as she peels off her dressing gown and negligee, leaving them to fall on the ground. Pick them up, I say. Don't leave them lying there like that. She bends over and gathers them in her arms dumping them in the wicker laundry basket in the corner of my room. Standing there, wearing just her pants I look at her curves. Her breasts are heavy and her stomach swollen. Her skin is like porcelain. When she turns to open her wardrobe, I see the splodges of brown and blue on her legs. She reaches in and pulls out a fluffy jumper and a pair of leggings. I sit on the bed waiting and watching and wondering.

The train was now running one hundred and fifty minutes late, said the guard. I am sorry, he said. I believed he genuinely was. Sorry. I called my mother last night to say sorry. But she started talking about the wind and how noisy it was. The recycling boxes had blown over and wine and beer bottles rattled and clinked along the road. I'm sorry mum, I said. What are you talking about, she said in her clipped voice. Call me in the morning, I am tired, she said. I wondered if she would be sorry. I wondered if my dad ever told her he was sorry. You are entitled to compensation, said the guard. You can make a claim, he said. But could I really make a claim? Was I entitled to compensation?

The woman I do not know is now back in the kitchen wiping the surfaces. I am at her side and I watch as she flinches when she hears the scratch of a key in the lock. We both turn and wait. He walks into the kitchen smiling in that way he does. For a moment I forget everything and just gaze. Then he pulls her into his arms, he buries his face in her hair and then kisses her. What about me, I say. What about me? Then slowly and deliberately he scans the room behind her, his eyes resting on something over her shoulder. He shoves her out of the way and grabs the teabag from the sink. He reaches out to coil his hand through her hair and yanks her head back towards him. I do not need to see anymore. It is just the same. I leave the room and the woman I do not know behind.

A year ago I sat on the stairs, waiting for him to get home. Then I heard that scratch of the key in the lock, listened as he bounced through the door then slammed it shut. He looked straight through me, his eyes bloodshot, his hair messed by the wind. I watched as the spittle flew from his mouth along with accusations. I watched as his fist came towards me but I dodged out of the way. You shouldn't have done that, he said in my ear. As he dragged me down the stairs, I pulled the knife from my pocket and jabbed wildly. I watched as the blade, which I'd chopped carrots with earlier, was shoved upwards then back towards me. At first it tickled. Then a warm trickle of blood oozed from within. That was the biggest surprise. I thought it had turned to stone. I watched his eyes widen, horrified as he realised what had happened. Sorry. Sorry. I watched as he pulled the knife from me and reached for his phone. There's been an accident, he said. My wife, she tried to attack me. It was self-defence, he said. I stopped listening then. Lalalalalala. I gasped when I realised what this meant. When my own heart stopped beating, I would see my baby again. The one I lost when he punched me in the gut. This was good. This was my compensation. I was free. So I floated away to catch that train, leaving my broken body behind.

THREE POEMS

Erin May Kelly

Silence

She told me that she doesn't watch the news anymore.

She did not want to watch TV or turn on the radio.

The man who left blue and red on her thighs did not just walk free on her street. He was directing movies in Hollywood. He was in the UK Top 40 singing love songs. He was president of the United States.

She said they had made her afraid of her own body because she knows now how easily it can be broken. She is afraid of her own voice because it can never be loud enough for people who are covering their ears.

She was drunk, she hates men, she wants attention, she was asking for it, her skirt was too short, she should have known better.

She said that false accusations were used as reasons to call her a liar. Alcohol means that he didn't know what he was doing but that she should have known better. Tight dresses mean that he couldn't help himself and that she does not deserve help.

She said that everyone she told made sure to do anything they could but listen.

She said that they were no longer allowed to burn us as witches, so they had to find other ways to silence us.

Deep Water

We are tired.

We are tired of hearing how it was our fault for not out swimming the shark.

Tired of clutching coffee cups in the break room listening to a joke in which our drowning is the punch line.

Tired of explaining why we “didn’t just leave” for stiller waters.

Another woman is murdered for turning down male advances and you are angry because not all men are like that.

And your pride is more important than our survival.

We clutch our coffee cups harder as you tell us that our fear is irrational.

If the bite marks on our necks make you more defensive than appalled then you are the one throwing bleeding butcher’s meat into the sea.

Focus less on handing out life jacket advice and more on calling out the shadow circling our feet.

We are tired of hearing how we should just stay out of the water if we don’t want to get bitten.

We are tired of treading water and fearing the ocean. We are tired of comparing men to sharks.

We are tired.

Survive

I don't know how you feel. I won't pretend to. I'm sorry.

I do know that I have seen you every day. Still here.

Every ten minutes you brush your teeth to get rid of the taste of his tongue. The way you get better can't be given to you in bullet points or self help books.

You are allowed to spend some days on the bathroom floor, screaming.

You are allowed to want to claw off every bit of skin that he touched until there is nothing left to hold you together.

You are allowed to feel better. Then worse. Then better again. Your healing doesn't have to be linear and you are making more progress that you could possibly imagine.

I hope it isn't long before you see how ferociously you have fought. On the days that nobody saw your tiny acts of bravery. Standing in the shower instead of sitting. Washing your hair.

I've never seen anything as brave as the way you keep living, on the days you want to stop. I would call you a Goddess but you are far too incredible to be hidden up amongst the stars.

I hope you never question that you are not the broken one. You are not a statistic or a punch line or a warning.

You are a survivor. This is not the end of you.

SARCASM AGAINST THE PATRIARCHY

Caitriona Large

Originally published on 'On Second Thought' blog

"Hey girl, nice arse." I hear you shout – how kind of you to say!

Because it's just for guys like you I work out every day....

"Hey babe come here, don't be shy" - You catch me in your arm.

How could I resist your drunken sweaty grinning charm?

"Don't be frigid pretty girl." - your hands give me a squeeze.

But of course, when I say no, I say it just to tease.

"Why so quiet, don't be rude." - I try to move away,

Forgive me sir, I quite forgot that I'm obliged to stay.

"Come dance with me, it's just a dance." - your hands now start to pet,

But, of course, when I say no, I'm playing hard to get.

"Come back to mine, just for a drink." - I really must refuse

However kind it is of you to offer me more booze.

I didn't dance or flirt or touch, I said no every time.

You grope and kiss and pull because your voice means more than mine.

CONSEQUENCE

Charlotte Platt

Sayeeda Khan was not in the business of summoning djinn. She had been in business, had helped develop a mill and after she came to the UK ran her own stall, then a shop, then sold her shop and built up another.

Sayeeda Khan was an enterprising woman who did many things, and her family knew it.

What her family didn't know was that Sayeeda knew some old magic, knew things that were passed on in hot summer nights when the rolling thunder of the monsoons tumbled through the air without breaking, when the promise of rain was pregnant on the wind. She had never told them of it, simply kept the memories of her Nani close in her heart.

They also didn't know that she was using these now. How could they? They were all in hospital with her granddaughter, Mahnoor, and they wouldn't come looking for some time. Time was all she needed.

She was using the garage, the only place she could think of being reasonably fireproof, and hoped that would not put her in bad stead with her summoned guest. She had made it as nice as she could, candles and scented oils to cover the smell of old grass and older boxes. Denesh would be furious if he ever found out, but Sayeeda didn't plan for this to take long enough for him to come home.

Sayeeda had drawn her circle in the centre of the concrete floor, placed her offering inside it and now began to chant, focusing on the need screaming in her soul as she impeached powers much older than her greying hair. A purple flame began to flicker around the circle, the dusky hue of ripe figs, the fire banking and rising as her chant went on.

With the pop of crackling wood a woman appeared in the circle and Sayeeda stopped, eyes widening at the sight before her. She was taller than Sayeeda, her ochre skin alive with the same purple flame of the circle and her bright clothes flowing around her. Dark hair fanned out, buffeted by the flames, and her eyes were the deep blood red of things Sayeeda knew should not be looked at too long.

Sayeeda knelt, lowering her head and spreading her arms wide. She knew the circle would hold, but it was better not to prick the pride of the fire people. She could feel the heat pouring off the circle, an open oven in the middle of a rainy Manchester afternoon.

"Please excuse this intruding upon you, mistress, but I seek a bargain."

"Who are you to know this little trick then?" the voice was not unlike Sayeeda's, the lilting pull of Urdu tugging at memories from home.

"I am the granddaughter of women who knew many of your peers once, before humans disturbed the simplicity of the mountains."

"And you call me to this place for service: a bold choice. I am Sashana. Why do you ask me here? Look at me when you answer." The firmness in her voice was enough to bring Sayeeda's eyes up, though the power rolling off her would have done the same.

"I seek justice I cannot enact. I offer gold and obligation." Sayeeda rose as she said it, nodding to the jewellery piled within the circle. They were wedding gifts, saved in the attic for retirement

but now seeking something more important. The djinn leant down, pushing the items apart before glancing to Sayeeda. The woman seemed to fluctuate, the ripple of fire over her causing her to shimmer in and out of the candle light.

"What makes a human woman ask a djinn for a favour? We have long memories; I may seek repayment at any time. Or , I may take offence, and kill you."

"My granddaughter has been wronged. I would seek blood but the laws here do not allow it. The laws here will not hurt the man that did this. He will be shamed, he may be taken to court, but he will not have to face what my Mahnoor will have to."

"He wronged her honour?" Sashana asked, eyebrows raising.

"No, he paid a coward to throw a liquid in her face, which melted her. Like your fire melts metal this acid melts the skin, and my granddaughters face is gone. Not burned or scarred, but gone." Sayeeda felt the tears start to fall as she spoke but couldn't stop, the words pouring out of her under the crimson gaze of her flaming companion. "She will never look in a mirror and see her face again. She will never see her dimples, or the lines that smiles bring over time, or the crinkles that tears track over a life. The doctors will do their best for her, and help was found quickly, but she will never be who she was. He has wiped her from the world because she would not be his."

"She refused his advances?"

Sayeeda nodded. "She wanted to study before marriage."

"A common thing now, we see it," the djinn commented, tilting her head to look Sayeeda over. "You seek vengeance?"

"I seek a balance," Sayeeda said firmly. "He is never going to suffer the way she has. I want him to suffer something. To give him an idea of what he has caused. Men like him cannot conceive of us as people, only possessions. I want him to feel what it is like to be viewed as a thing and not a man."

"Do you think your granddaughter would want this?" Sashana asked, walking to the edge of the circle so she could look down into Sayeeda's eyes.

"I don't know," Sayeeda said after a pause. "They have had her unconscious because of the pain she is in. She cannot say what she wants. I cannot speak for her. She is a kinder soul than I am but I know a trail will hurt her. I know her recovery will mean a lot of pain. I don't think she should be alone in her suffering."

"What would you have me do, granddaughter of wise women?" Sashana asked, stroking her hand along her cheek. Sayeeda notice she wore bracelets, layers of thin beads crossing over each other in a tapestry of colour, shifting as her hand moved.

"I would have him suffer the same as Manhoor. I would have him know fear and pain and the removal of power. I would have him haunted. I will not ask for his life, but I would ask that he feels what she felt."

The djinn hummed, pacing away from Sayeeda to sit in the middle of the circle and flicking the hem of her long jacket out behind her. With her legs crossed Sayeeda could see the strength of the muscles in Sashana's legs, the firm thighs draped in loose turquoise trousers. The woman was beautiful, if terrifying in a way Sayeeda didn't think she would be able to explain. She waited, watching the djinn sort the golden jewellery and pieces into two piles.

She pushed the larger pile away, sorting through the smaller one like a magpie.

“Tell me his name,” she called out as she worked.

“Mikaal Revis. He lives close by.”

Sashana hummed again, nodding to herself and never glancing up.

Eventually, she settled on three pieces: a necklace, a thick arm band and a star brooch. Sashana scooped them up, cradling them close as she came back to face Sayeeda.

“Were any of these items intended for your grand daughter?” she asked, eyes flicking over the smaller woman’s face.

“No, these were for saved, for sale or donation after my death.”

“There is a lot of gold there.”

“I did not wish to seem insulting in my request.”

“A wise consideration. I will take these items and do as you ask.”

“I am in your debt,” Sayeeda smiled, bowing her head. “Do you wish me to give you blood to seal the bargain?”

“I would not offer your blood so easily,” Sashana laughed, waving her offer away. “I will call in my debt when I wish. In the meantime, donate some of that gold now, to a charity that feeds the poor. I don’t care which.”

“As you wish,” Sayeeda agreed, stepping back from the circle before breaking the outer chalk line with one foot. The purple fire stuttered and died, though the woman remained. Well, that wasn’t meant to happen.

Sashana stepped towards her, the flames gone from her skin and her hair sitting loose down her shoulders and back. Sashana reached forward, laying a hand on Sayeeda’s cheek. Sayeeda felt the pulsing heat under the umber skin of the palm cupping her face. She stayed very still, looking around Sashana’s eyes rather than in them, aware of her vulnerability now the circle was gone.

“You are concerned,” Sashana commented, watching Sayeeda’s careful stillness.

“Surprised. I had thought breaking the circle released you.”

“It does, I simply chose to stay. I did not want your blood, but I did want to see you properly.”

“I hope I am satisfying enough for you to have to stand in Manchester without due cause,” Sayeeda smiled, aware the heat on her cheek was being matched with her own blush.

“I think so, yes. You are an interesting curiosity Sayeeda Qureshi.”

“How did you know my old name?” She shouldn’t have been surprised really; the fire people knew an awful lot.

“There are a limited number of people who could bring this knowledge with them, and we have long memories. You have married, but I know your name. I know those items I took, and where

they travelled from. I know you must feel deeply to give away memories of home.” Sashana stopped, stroking her hand up and over Sayeeda’s hair, tucking some behind her ear.

“I am honoured to be with one so knowledgeable,” Sayeeda said, and meant it, dropping her eyes.

“You brought me here, I feel you can claim a similar title,” Sashana said.

“You flatter me.”

“No, I acknowledge what you are. Formidable women should lift each other, and I intend to do so. Look at me Sayeeda.”

Sayeeda did as asked, meeting those bloody red eyes. A thrill, equal parts fear and curiosity, went through her as Sashana gazed back, her eyes flicking over Sayeeda’s face.

“You will need to be very strong for your granddaughter, and I will ensure your debt is nothing that would interfere with that. Let her take from your strength as she needs it, because she will.”

“Of course, her blood is my blood.”

“Good. Now, go and see your granddaughter, and be somewhere you are seen and people know you. There is no point in your efforts if your police suspect you.”

“Thank you,” Sayeeda breathed, stepping away from the heat of Sashana’s body and turning to reach for the rug she would throw over the garage floor, to hide the circle. She could wash it off later, in the night while Omar slept and would not notice her moving around in his space. She heard the cracking noise, a flame jumping between branches, and knew she was alone now. She covered the chalk, opened the window, snuffed the candles, then gathered up the items she had left the hospital to collect and drove back.

* * *

Mikaal was walking home, sated from his time in the pub and the result of his plans. He knew he would get interviewed by the police, that was inevitable, but he had an alibi and the man he had paid would be out of the city and possibly the country by now.

This was regrettable, Manhoor had been very beautiful, but she was headstrong and disobedient and he would not tolerate the gift he had offered her being rejected. Girls like her assumed they could behave that way because of their looks, and their charm, dismissing men who were well above them because of their own notions. It couldn’t be seen to be allowed, not openly. Not in a way that reflected on him.

So he had paid a man to fix it for him.

He wondered idly if Manhoor would come back to him, if the pain and shame would bring her to heel. Her bitch of a grandmother would probably interfere but she couldn’t give Manhoor what he could.

He wouldn’t take her back. He might see her a while, take his fill, but he didn’t want her now.

He smirked to himself, pulling out his cigarettes. He wasn’t meant to smoke, it was frowned upon, but he could afford to have one just now.

He was shaken from his enjoyment by a woman walking along the road, sunglasses on in the autumn gloom. Her pace was slower than his, those long legs taking their time, and she was looking at a map. This was not the place to be advertising you were lost and Mikhaal quickly made a pace with her, trying to catch her eye.

"You need a hand?" he asked once she acknowledged him, nodding to the map.

"I am having some trouble," she laughed, a tinkling thing Mikhaal liked. She was tall, almost his height, and her dark hair was in a loose plait down her back. "I can't find my hostel."

"No one in the city to help you? It's dangerous for women to travel alone."

"I'm visiting a friend in hospital," she shrugged, tugging on the strap of her bag.

"Well I can walk you to where you're looking for if you want?" he asked, spotting the circled spot on her map. Not far away really, past a few old shops and she'd be there.

"I don't usually let strange men walk me to where I'm sleeping for the night."

"I'm a good man; I won't come up after you. I'll point the door out to you and leave you before we reach it if you want."

"That would be very reasonable of you," she nodded, holding out a hand. "Sashana." What a bold little thing.

"I'm Mikhaal."

"Thank you for your help Mikhaal."

"You're welcome. This way." He led her along the road, up past the disused shops, between the old, dark buildings.

No place for a woman to walk around alone.

"This doesn't seem like the best neighbourhood," Sashana sighed.

"It has good and bad parts. Is your friend unwell?"

"She has been injured; she will need help in her recovery. I hope to give her some assistance."

"I'll have her in my prayers," he offered, nodding to her.

"That's kind, thank you," Sashana smiled. "It is a worry. Recovery can be such a hard time, almost worst than the injury."

"I've never needed to do it, but hopefully your here will help."

"I do intend to help," Sashana confirmed, a private smile passing over her face.

"Well you're here now, so that should be a start. Your hostel is the bright yellow door across the street, very close to the train station as well."

“So quick as well. Here, let me thank you,” she said, tugging his shoulder. He leaned into her, feeling the brush of her lips against his cheek and shivering at the heat from her skin, so close to his.

She smelled of wood smoke and the spicy earth of yarrow root, home cooking flooding his memory. He hadn't been around that for a long time.

“A bold thing to do when you don't know me,” he laughed, pulling himself away from her.

“Oh I know you,” she said, turning her head to look at him full. “There are hundreds of men like you that I have met, many of whom have never met another afterwards.”

“What are you talking about?” he asked, backing away a pace.

“I'm talking about men who don't know the difference between a person and a prize, Mikaal.” She said his name like she was tasting it, her mouth forming the sound slowly, and he felt ice dripping through his ribcage.

“I don't know what you're talking about-” he began but the words faltered as he caught the scent of pork, the sudden pain in his face catching him unaware. He doubled over, howling as it lanced down along his jaw and over the ridge of his nose. He couldn't see, static flooding behind his eyes as he clawed at the burning mark of her kiss, the white hot shooting agony.

“That's going to hurt for a while,” she commented off to his side and he swung blindly, flailing at her. “No point in that either.”

“What did you do to me?” he slurred out, falling to his knees and blessing the brief relief he got from the tarmac, cool and damp in the evening light.

“Nothing you wouldn't wish on others.”

He screamed, the fire reaching over his whole face now, the sizzling of his hair curling in his nostrils. He slammed a fist into the ground, trying to grind out some sensation other than the infernal heat on his skin.

“You're going to have to see a lot of doctors about that, eventually,” he heard whispered in his ear and he flinched, scrambling away from her. He heard his laughter chase him.

“Why?” he groaned.

“Call it a rectification of a debt. You won't be blind for long, once the swelling goes down then the scar tissue will probably be the worst of it. There won't be any of your face left. You'll be awfully ugly I'm afraid, but then you already were weren't you?”

He tried to huff a response but he was panting against the pain now, and he could feel himself pushed along the precipice of unconsciousness. With an aching cry he let himself go into it, drifting down to the call of sirens somewhere close to him.

THREE POEMS

Anila Mirza

The glass door

Behind the glass door
I could feel the drops of water
running over my cold body
I was awake and still
lost in another world
I could feel no more
I could sense no more
I was conscious and unconscious
in a state of neither motion nor rest
not dead not alive
just paralysed
waiting and waiting
for that one moment
when the glass breaks
and I am free again
to be reborn

شیشے کا دروازہ

شیشے کے دروازے کے پیچھے
میں پانی کے قطرے محسوس کر سکتی تھی
میرے سرد جسم پہ گرتے ہوئے
میں جاگ رہی تھی
پر دوسری دنیا میں کھوئی ہوئی
میں کچھ اور محسوس نہیں کر سکتی تھی
اور نہ ہی سمجھ سکتی تھی
میں ہوش میں تھی اور بے ہوش بھی
جمعود کی حالت میں
نہ زندہ اور نہ مردہ
صرف مفلوج
منتظر اور بس منتظر
اس لمحے کے لئے
جب یہ شیشہ ٹوٹ جائے
اور میں ایک بار پھر آزاد ہو جاؤں
ایک نئے جنم کے لئے

"The wedding dress"

I told her
It's not just a dress
It's a sign
Sign of hope
Hope and love
Love and freedom
Freedom and happiness
And Lifelong companionship

And she said thoughtfully
Yes...

It's a sign
Sign of despair
Despair and disbelief
Disbelief and control
Control and subjection
And lifelong gilded cage

شادی کا جوڑا

میں نے اسے بتایا
یہ صرف کپڑے نہیں ہے
یہ ایک نشانی ہے
امید کی نشانی
امید اور محبت کی
محبت اور آزادی کی
آزادی اور خوشی کی
اور زندگی بھر کے ساتھ کی

اور اس نے سوچ کر کہا
جی ہاں ...

یہ ایک نشانی ہے
ناامیدی کی نشانی
ناامیدی اور بے یقینی کی
بے یقینی اور اختیار کی
اختیار اور تابعداری کی
اور زندگی بھر کے لئے سونے کے پنجرے کی

The story

The story I loved
and read over and over again
has become my own
I choose to live in two realities
one with one moon and
another one with two
while my soul thrives on this conflict
my mind is getting tired
running between the two
somehow I like living with two moons
that's where all the magic happens
it's the land of dreams
where we sing our own song
the song which heals us
my eyes are closed
with a faint hope
let me live here forever

کہانی

وہ کہانی جسے میں نے چاہا
اور بار بار پڑھا
میری اپنی بن گئی ہے
میں نے دو حقیقتوں میں رہنا چن لیا ہے
ایک ایک چاند والی
اور دوسری دو چاند والی
جہاں میری روح اس اختلاف پہ پنپتی ہے
وہاں میرا دماغ تھک چکا ہے
دونوں کے درمیان بھاگتے ہوئے
نہ جانے کیوں مجھے دو چاندوں والی حقیقت میں رہنا پسند ہے
یہاں جادو ہوتا ہے
یہ خوابوں کی دنیا ہے
جہاں ہم اپنا نغمہ گاتے ہیں
وہ نغمہ جو ہمیں شفا دیتا ہے
میں آنکھیں بند کیئے ہوئے
ایک مدہم سی امید ہے کہ
مجھے ہمیشہ یہاں رہنے دو

