



## Review of the Year: Victim Blaming in the media

As 2013 draws to a close, my review of the year will focus on the comments made by those in public life, and the actions taken by our team to challenge these. I wanted to call it 'stupid shit said by people who ought to know better' but I couldn't evidence the latter part of this statement. It seems that a headline grab or a controversial tweet likely to be retweeted hundreds of times is too big a temptation for some.

EVB launched due to media coverage of Julian Stevenson, a British man living in France who [killed both of his children during an access visit](#). The UK media and the police in France almost fell over themselves to explain Stevenson's behaviour; a 'difficult divorce', 'unsuitable access arrangements'. We were outraged at the repeated excuses for domestic abuse, sexual violence and murder and knew many of you felt the same way and we needed to take action to demand change.

Popping up in the media to tell the criminologists, policy makers and law enforcers where they were going wrong was none other than the TV presenter, Nick Ross. It seems Nick mistook his responsibility on Crimewatch - instead of him presenting, he appeared to believe he was a super-sleuth, solving the clues so we could rest easy in our beds, and ensuring we 'don't have nightmares'. Nick's book was serialised in the Mail, the reading of which is enough to trigger a nightmare on many occasions. We read the chapter on Rape - needless to say, the book itself wasn't on our Christmas list. Many of our supporters submitted pieces in response to Nick Ross - you can find them [here](#).

Closely behind Ross was none other than Anne Diamond. What is it with these 1980's TV presenters rushing to defend the abusive culture that flourished in the media industry, allowing abusers such as Jimmy Savile and others to continue to abuse women and children with impunity? Diane Martin, one of our supporters, wrote a [beautiful response to these comments](#).

It wasn't just TV presenters who came out blaming women for the actions of predatory men, oh no. In fact, one local newspaper, The Bolton News, went as far as blaming women's binge drinking for an increase in sexual assaults. We wrote about it [here](#) - make sure you take in the righteous indignation of The Bolton News editor. Interestingly, we received neither a libel notification nor an email requesting further discussion.

Back to celebrity TV presenters - it's now time for Doctor Christian Jessen to take centre stage. A man with medical training, a significant television career and a high social media profile really ought to have known better, but sadly it seemed not. We're not going to linger on this topic, but we had an interesting submission from a man who compared how he (and his male friends) don't spend any time thinking about whether they are going to be falsely accused of rape, yet he knows many women for whom rape is a [familiar worry and real possibility](#). Dr Jessen ignored this comment, despite it not coming from an ['aggressive feminist'](#).

Next up on the EVB wall of shame is Robert Colover - a prosecution barrister who labelled a 13yo victim of sexual abuse as 'predatory in all her actions'. The combined activism of our team



and 56,007 of you who signed our Change.org petition requesting an investigation by the CPS resulted in [Colover being removed from prosecuting similar cases](#). Incidentally, David Cameron waltzed in at the last moment in an [attempt to take all of the credit](#) for our grassroots activism and campaigning.

NSPCC were on our radar this year too - one of their branch managers gave a character reference for Stuart Hall during his [trial for sexual offences against children](#). We had some further discussion by email with Peter Wanless, the NSPCC CEO, who arranged for us to be contacted by their child protection lead in order to discuss this issue in more depth. Sadly, the CP lead failed to keep his appointment with us. Unfortunately, Wanless then wrote an [unhelpful and misleading piece for the Mirror](#), stating:

"There is evidence that some people with paedophilic tendencies have a genetic trait that can be triggered at some point, leading them to commit atrocious sexual offences."

"Some sex offenders will have been abused in childhood themselves."

The CEO of the UK's biggest child protection charity making sweeping statements like this is unhelpful and damaging to survivors. The 'I cannot help myself' excuse has been debunked numerous times, and so it is disappointing to see it rearing its head again - by someone who ought to know better.

Many UK police forces [surpassed themselves with pre-Christmas gifts](#). The dreadful Nottinghamshire 'anti-rape' poem, no doubt penned by a too-clever-by-half officer, was defended by their senior sexual offences lead, Helen Chamberlain. One of our team spoke about the issues with this poem on Radio 4 Today, leading us neatly to John Humphrys.....

Oh. John Humphrys. How we despair when you are the presenter [discussing sexual violence](#). How we wish someone would cut your mic, or at least offer you some training on rape myths and how not to perpetuate them. That would at least go some way to avoiding ridiculous statements such as this:

"And it really is rape. It's not a question of young children 11 -12 years old going out in a gang and perhaps getting hold of some alcohol and engaging in consensual sex. It's a question of young girls being physically attacked and raped by boys?"

Channel 4 News can often be relied on to cover domestic & sexual violence and abuse in a respectful way; including covering stories that are absent from other mainstream news outlets. However, their coverage of the Hamzah Khan case was poor - including [interviewing Hamzah's father, who had been convicted of abusing Hamzah's mother](#). Channel 4 News were not the



only outlet to deal with this case in a sensationalist and ignorant manner, as our analysis of the [media headlines reporting the case shows](#).

'Stupid statement made by a politician' was claimed by Edwin Poots, Northern Ireland Health Minister. Mr Poots blocked us on twitter after we wrote [this piece](#), hopefully his electorate will remember this in 2015.

Complaining to a newspaper is one way of challenging statements or comments that are published, and one of our supporters [did just that](#). The Times were dismissive and arrogant in their response, thus confirming the need for some sort of meaningful press regulation in 2014. Professor David Nutt was more responsive - we look forward to a joint blog written by him and Holly, who challenged his comments.

The media continued to be obsessed with the race of perpetrators of sexual violence as long as they weren't white. We wrote about the [coverage of the York child sexual exploitation case](#) in comparison with the cases in Oxford, Rochdale and Rotherham.

A review of the year can't be all 'Sinners', we need to ensure that we celebrate those who are working hard to report domestic & sexual violence and abuse responsibly, accurately and without sensationalism. Our 'Saints' confirmed that change is possible and kept our spirits up when the job just seemed too big, too complex and too ingrained to change.

As an organisation, the BBC are improving (despite the continued gaffes by John Humphrys). During 2013, I have noticed that when celebrities are arrested for domestic & sexual violence and abuse, the stories are no longer listed exclusively in the 'Entertainment & Arts' section of the website. I've also noticed an improvement in the language used - one of our supporters [complained about the BBC using the word 'row' to describe an incident of domestic violence](#) and the headline was changed as a result of this complaint. I see fewer mentions of the term 'child pornography' and more use of 'indecent images/images of child sexual abuse'. The headlines still need work - the snappy phrase 'child porn' seems almost irresistible to copy editors.

The BBC also co-produced The Unspeakable Crime: Rape during 2013. We wrote a review of the programme [here](#) and hope for more sensitive programming of this type during 2014.

Print journalism of the Ian Watkins case was reasonably responsible, especially the debate and discussion around the naming of the mothers in this case. Most pieces clearly stated that the identity of the mothers is withheld in order to protect the identities of the children as victims of sexual abuse. Sadly, many ignorant people decided that [their needs were more important](#) than those of the children in this horrific case.

Kevin Rawlinson took the time to discuss the intricacies of court reporting with us, following a heated twitter debate, and wrote a detailed piece about the coverage of the [Oxford child sexual exploitation case](#). A huge thank you to Kevin for continuing to report violence against women and girls responsibly, and for writing a piece that made our campaign [headline news in August](#).

Another 'Saint' of 2013 is CRASAC. They worked closely with Coventry City Council in order to



produce the 'Rape is Rape' campaign. It is simple, clear and unambiguous. They have ensured that myths around rape and sexual violence are challenged and that the responsibility for preventing rape must lie wholly with the perpetrator. We hope that this campaign is taken up nationally, and we'll continue to direct people to it in order to educate them about this issue. If you haven't watched the video, you can do so via [this piece](#).

Our final 'Saint' of 2013 is you, dear reader. You support and encourage us each day. We feel safe to disclose our failing, and acknowledge our [own internalised victim blaming](#). Those of you writing for us, sharing your experiences with us, discussing our campaign with others, recommending us to those perpetuating myths, volunteering for us, including us in your [end of year reviews](#) - we can't do this without you. 2013 has been a huge year for us, and we could not have made these significant changes without you. Thank you. Thank you for everything you do. There are too many of you to mention individually, but if you wrote [this piece](#), you made our year.

Here's to 2014 - may there be no need for a piece with the work-in-progress title of 'stupid shit said by people who ought to know better'!

\*updated 31/12/13 18:58\*

[Society Guardian, Helen Pidd & Greater Manchester Police](#) scream in at the last moment, to steal the Sinners 2013 crown from an already outstanding field. If you'd like to write a response, please do so via [this link](#). We can manage nothing more than our heads bouncing off the keyboard, to the tune of Auld Lang Syne!

Happy New Year. There's work to do in 2014.