The Silencer - an open letter to those quick to defend, slow to reflect.

I am an EVB volunteer. This morning, another EVB volunteer challenged Mark Williams (@mwilliamsthomas) on this tweet (which was in response to this story http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-23513254).

 "The story about the 12yr girl being raped in London in early hours of Sunday morning is horrific. But what was she doing out at that time?"

The subsequent debate and defence of this tweet has troubled me greatly so I have decided to write a post (inspired by my twitlonger).

Before I do so, I am willing to share with you that I am an adult survivor of rape and sexual abuse. I also experienced rape and abuse as a child. These experiences, alongside my professional experiences and qualifications have enabled me to not only process and manage my own experiences, but to support other survivors.

Regarding Mark's tweet, speaking as a child survivor, I need to emphasize that if I were that 12 year old girl reading that tweet I would assume that either myself or those who were responsible for my care were being blamed instead of the people raping me. The focus from the perpetrators is shifted immediately. This is NOT ok.

Regarding the subsequent defence of Mark's tweet, the person responsible for rape is the rapist. Some of us had wonderful parenting yet it didn't stop us being raped. Many survivors are raped in their home, often by people we know. I share concerns regarding a 12 year old being out late at night. But surely the focus on this particular story and where our energies should focus is the fact that a child was raped.

Victim blaming can be subtle – as can be shifting the focus onto others. We do this for a variety of reasons. To focus the blame on others, or even to blame survivors keeps us psychologically safe – it means we can 'prevent' it from happening to our loved ones and to ourselves. I greatly empathise and sympathise with people who victim-blame. It is so much more comfortable to do that than to come to the horrific realisation that the only people who can prevent rape are rapists. That is just too terrifying. But it is the truth.

Sometimes survivors self-blame. I did for many years and sometimes still do. By self-blaming I thought I could control my safety and I thought that my physical appearance had made me somehow responsible. But the ugly, terrifying truth is that the blame lies with the perpetrators. The only people responsible for raping this young girl are the alleged rapists.

Questions regarding caring responsibilities/safeguarding should be asked – of course they should - but they shouldn't be your biggest concern. It shouldn't be your first question if you truly are victim-centred. This is BASIC. Furthermore, people who support/work with victims can victim-blame. As can victims themselves. Working for victims' rights does NOT make you

immune from victim-blaming. That is a very dangerous path to walk down.

I was greatly disturbed to see a tweet from someone who responded to my twitlonger on the subject with this:

"You may think what he said was victim blaming but its (sic) not. Could you possibly be over thinking it because your (sic) a survivor?"

This statement is damaging, insensitive, minimising, dismissive and silencing. As a survivor, I am more easily tuned into victim-blaming. To the person who sent this tweet, you are perpetuating the myth that survivors are not the experts in their own experience. My own experiences don't automatically qualify me to support others. They DO, however, make me an expert in my own experience. My decade in working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse and education do enable me to advocate, support, empower and encourage the voices of survivors. I see victim-blaming and call it out. I'm a survivor. I was silenced for too long and despite the continuous attempts, I will no longer be silent.

Please LISTEN to the voices of victims and survivors when we ASK you to reflect on your language and behaviour. Don't let defence be your first response - try to reflect why/how you may be victim-blaming. When you do, an apology would be greatly welcomed. Thank you.