



“Why doesn’t she just leave him?”: The result of false narratives on women’s lives.

Today I have had the misfortune of reading Maureen Messent’s comment piece for the Birmingham Mail entitled ‘Our ‘holy cows’ are own worst enemies’ (<http://www.donotlink.com/f0Z>) which is heavy on the victim blaming bile and ignorant, pro-police opinion but lacks absolutely any facts, figures or even anecdotes. Even Richard Littlejohn has the imagination to use ridiculous anecdotes to back up his weird opinions, much alike those ridiculous memes on facebook about pensioners being asked to remove their poppies in case they upset an imaginary Muslim or whatever. Even the stupid know they need human stories to give flesh and blood to ideas and therefore cement their opinions to the masses. So her lack of any kind of anecdote really does leave this piece with nine paragraphs of bitter thoughts. It is literally the ramblings of someone, with all due respects, hasn’t a clue about what she is talking about.

Messent explains that women who don’t leave violent partners are their own worst enemies and are “never to be held accountable for staying with brutal men, never to be told the harm done to children who watch these beatings”. If this were true we wouldn’t be faced with pure apathy on the constant closures of refuges, MVAWG charities wouldn’t be some of the least supported charities being trumped by animals and opinions as vapid as this wouldn’t even exist. If people in general truly cared for women in abusive relationships then the nasty press would not sensationalise every single story of a man beating a woman to death with added irrelevant details about how she had left (jilted) him, how they were struggling with custody and how violent and frenzied these murders tend to be.

Messent is galled by the fact that last week the HMIC found that many police forces in the UK are not up to standard with regards to treatment of victims of domestic violence: “Not all police leaders are ensuring that domestic abuse is a priority in their forces”. The HMIC report entitled ‘Everyone’s business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse’, the 155 page document, which I doubt Messent has even glanced at, is damning in its data and information:

“Domestic abuse is a priority on paper but, in the majority of forces, not in practice. Almost all police and crime commissioners have identified domestic abuse as a priority in their Police and Crime Plans. All forces told us that it is a priority for them. This stated intent is not translating into operational reality in most forces. Tackling domestic abuse too often remains a poor relation to acquisitive crime and serious organised crime.”

This is serious. It means that a crime that 1 in 4 young people are victims of, a crime that is costing the UK economy £15.7 billion a year and a crime that a woman is dying every 2.4 days from is not important enough to our police force. Despite Messent’s claim that this report is unfair she cannot deny these findings.

She claims that the 77 women’s deaths from domestic violence in 2013 are ‘avoidable’ and she is absolutely correct; they could be avoided if men stopped killing women, if our press reported on male violence to women and girls with integrity and honesty without resorting to



victim blaming and thusly everyone reacts to this violence with horror and not apathy. They could be avoided if services to women and children being abused weren't being slashed in cost-cutting incentives by local governments and avoided if refuges were not being closed. They could be avoided if our police force believed women on the first occasion of reporting without creating false narratives in their heads before they have even interviewed the victim as in the case of Alex Farragher who was called a 'fucking slag' in a phone message by her investigating police officer. They could be avoided if they offered real support to women leaving abusive partners and not refuse, as in the case of Cassandra Hassanovic who was murdered by her partner on the way to a refuge after being denied a police escort. It could be avoided if young boys were educated on masculinity and violence and equality.

It, however, is not avoided simply by women staying with their partners. This false non-argument clearly hasn't taken into consideration any real life stories that many of these murders, like Cassandra Hassanovic, happen once the woman has left her partner! Her claim that "we're never told how many of the dead women refused police advice to leave their attackers once and for all" as if this makes any kind of difference, just reiterates her total lack of understanding of male violence against women and girls and her contempt for women who are simply unable to leave.

Here in Devon, two refuges have shut in the last week due to "change in contract", which means that women in the Exeter and Barnstable areas have no real support framework from real experts in this field. To me, refuges are more than safe spaces but symbols of empathy, support and hope. They say that society is not prepared to put up with male violence, their mere existence as physical spaces of safety can be enough to help a woman leave. Now there is less and less.

Of course it is hard for women to leave when the alternative is a flea infested bed and breakfast without security and counselling and support. Would you, Maureen? If you report your crime to a police officer and they do not take you seriously, or listen to your partners claim that you attacked him first? Would you Maureen? If your police officer investigating loses vital evidence or refuses to even take evidence because they believe that you should just leave him? If you have absolutely no family to run to? If you own your home but your partner does not? If it is your father who is abusive and you are a teenager? If your partner uses extreme emotional blackmail and brainwashing? If your partner threatens to murder you if you leave them? If your partner threatens to kill your children or himself? Would you leave, Maureen?

Would you care to talk to actual victims of domestic violence like the report did or would you like to go through life blindly making up narratives of women experiencing domestic violence and stick to them despite evidence to the contrary?

The ironic thing is, Maureen Messent even answers her own question in the final paragraph of this piece, she says: "Battering is a foul and cowardly crime. Why, then, is it also the offence so many women balk at taking to court?". Why don't you read the report, Maureen, for yourself instead of filling in the gaps with ideas rather than facts.