

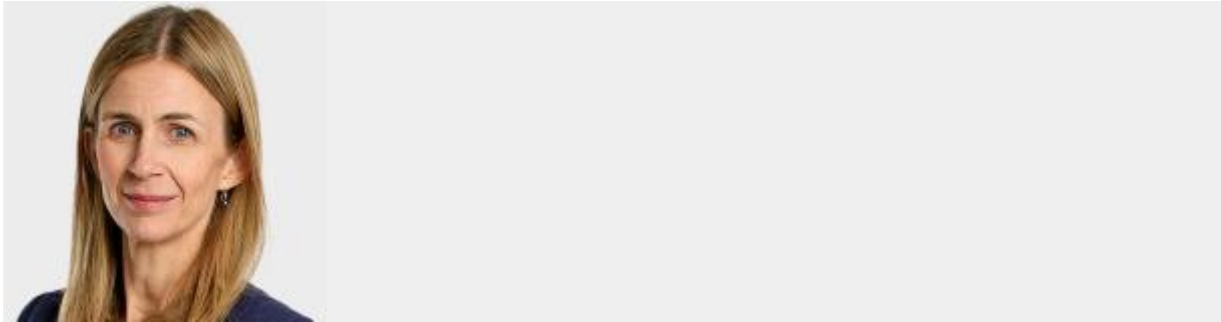
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## Victim blaming makes it easy for predators

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Three high-profile rape cases show how difficult it is to allow the young to enjoy their freedoms without being judged



How do the young stay safe in 2020? Avoid nightclubs, don't go to Cyprus, don't dress provocatively, don't be a wannabe actress and don't take up the offer of a drink or a bed for the night from random men.

This decade opens with three hideous rape cases in the news: the film producer Harvey Weinstein on trial in New York, the British teenager who said she was gang raped in Ayia Napa and the serial rapist in Manchester who drugged up to 195 young men before violating them.

In all three cases there is a sense of compassion for the alleged victims but also an undercurrent of judgment, a feeling perhaps that many of them may have brought it on themselves; that this is all about relationships that went wrong and young people who made bad decisions or chose risky lives, flirted too much, partied too hard, were too available on their love islands or too obsessed by their bosses and ambitious for their careers. But these cases aren't about naive youngsters recklessly showing off or acting stupidly, nor are they really about sex; they are about power and influence and who is using and abusing it.

Take Weinstein, who faces allegations that he raped one woman in a Manhattan hotel and performed a forcible sex act on a different woman. More than 80 women have come forward publicly to accuse the film producer of sexual misconduct ranging from harassment to assault. But Weinstein insists any sexual activity with ambitious actresses and staff was consensual and his attorney Donna Rotunno will argue that some even thanked him and are just attention-seeking.

Or consider the young woman in Cyprus who had offers from five universities to read criminology. She was having a relationship with a young Israeli man she met on a working holiday. They had sex in her resort but then she says she was raped by up to 11 other teenagers and men after they surreptitiously filmed her in bed with her boyfriend. She was left with internal injuries, cuts and bruises and went to the police.

The young men and their families have since done everything they can to destroy her reputation, as have the Cypriot authorities, who not only failed to investigate her complaint of rape but also

interrogated her for eight hours without a lawyer before telling her to sign a “confession”, written in flawed English, and accusing her of causing “public mischief”.

They portrayed her as a slag while the boys who boasted of their collective conquest were welcomed home as heroes in Israel. None of the men was even asked to give evidence. Now the broken girl returns to Britain with a conviction, possibly unable to pursue her hoped-for career with the police.

In Manchester, young male victims did nothing more than accept hospitality from Reynhard Sinaga, who befriended them at night on the streets, often after they had drunk too much, and then drugged them at his flat. Two have tried to commit suicide since discovering what happened to them while they were unconscious; all of the unknowing victims must wish the police hadn’t had to tell them. Some knew something was amiss but were too embarrassed to speak out. Sinaga boasted to a friend that they were asking for it.

How should we react to all this? We can’t tell our children never to aspire to become actresses, not to go on wild post-exam holidays in the Mediterranean, or to avoid going out at night in Manchester. We can’t say don’t ever get drunk, go on dating apps or flirt with anyone at work, or you will have to face the consequences. What we can do is teach them that no person or group should abuse their power and that it is always right to speak out if they feel uncomfortable in any circumstances — that they won’t be shamed for doing so.

It should be obvious that using your workplace authority to encourage junior staff to perform sexual acts is morally wrong. Women who voluntarily go to bed with one man are not agreeing to sleep with his friends. The very act of attempting to drug someone, regardless of the motivation, should lead to severe punishment. Those who touch people in a sexual way when they are too inebriated to comprehend what is happening to them should also feel the full force of the law.

Mature adults need to stop pitching male versus female and female versus trans, stirring up a culture war. Instead we need to talk to the young about how we prevent the abuse of power by either sex at work, on holiday, in relationships or while socialising. Politicians, the police, judges, doctors, teachers, employers and those running holiday resorts and nightclubs must encourage a culture of speaking out.

It is easy to say that alleged victims can also wield power to ruin innocent lives. But too often it is those who try to pursue justice who are vilified and traduced while we have become obsessed by rare false allegations. There has been a 52 per cent drop in the number of rape cases prosecuted since 2016, despite an increase of 43 per cent in complaints to police. From March 2018 to March 2019, there were 58,657 allegations of rape in England and Wales but only 1,925 successful prosecutions. It seems unlikely that all these women who didn’t secure a conviction are lying.

If we don’t take this more seriously, sexual predators will go free while our children will be the ones who have their freedoms curtailed. They may end up feeling guilty or even taking the blame if they are abused and be forced to live frightened, caged lives.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/victim-blaming-makes-it-easy-for-predators-xkbn7k0l6>

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