

Press release

Eaves responds to HMIC findings on police handling of domestic abuse

***“Senseless, ineffective, wasteful, discriminatory and above all inhumane.”
Women’s group slams police response to domestic abuse following HMIC report***

Eaves welcomes the HMIC report. Its findings chime very much with women’s sector’s experiences of responding to violence against women and girls.

It is bizarre however that the media and policy agenda will only respond to the issue when “their own kind” make the observations but feel able to ignore the women who live with this abuse and the women’s specialist services who support them. This happened last week with the Centre for Social Justice producing a report about girls and gangs when in fact all of their “findings” had been the core work of Carlene Firmin at Race on the Agenda and of the Office for the Children’s Commissioner for several years.

Now this HMIC report reiterates everything we have been saying for years and years. It points out shocking weaknesses in police attitudes, women feeling disbelieved, shoddy initial investigation and poor evidence gathering. The report stresses knowledge and skills gaps and poor supervision and points out that it is precisely the specialist domestic abuse units which can address these problems which are being lost in response to the cuts. The report stresses that police can deliver victimless prosecutions if they do their investigation seriously and thoroughly from the outset and that this would overcome the problem of many victims not wishing to testify.

During the Savile debacle, the Newsnight editor was reported as not having run his programme because the only testimony they had was “just the women¹.” Reports into police failings in domestic and sexual abuse find that women are routinely disbelieved. Women’s sector have produced expert research and evidence and years and years of bitter experience to point out what works and what doesn’t in responding to violence against women and we are routinely ignored. This is about the inferiority of women, the fact that they cannot be trusted, the fact that we silly, hysterical, emotional, liars. This is the culture of disbelief that discourages women from reporting, prevents successful prosecution and conviction and helps perpetrators to see such crimes as low risk to them.

Domestic abuse, has serious short and long term human and financial ramifications for victims and their families, for public services and for the economy. Not a week goes by without two women being murdered by their current or ex-partner² and thousands of women live in fear day in and day out in violent relationships. As long ago as 2004, the Department of Trade and Industry with Women’s Equality Unit had produced figures to

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20028560>

² <http://refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/domestic-violence-the-facts/>

demonstrate the cost of Domestic Violence to the economy as more than £16 Billion a year (Walby S. 2004, updated 2009³).

Denise Marshall, Chief Executive of Eaves said;

“We share the hope that this report, coming on the back of a worrying array of negative findings⁴ of police responses to violence against women and girls, may kickstart a whole new attitude and way of working.

After all, even in a climate of cuts and even if the focus is not on the victims but only on the costs – this approach is senseless, ineffective, wasteful, discriminatory and above all inhumane.

Recent damaging revelations of police officers⁵ targeting and exploiting young women who report domestic and sexual violence add to a picture of a highly flawed and discriminatory culture that impacts on women’s access to justice.

The recent landmark legal ruling,⁶ that held the police to be in breach of human rights obligations to the Worboys rape victims for systemic failings, may be a further spur to action”.

We want perpetrators held to account as much as anyone but for the criminal justice response to be part of the picture for the women there needs to be a major overhaul in police attitudes and behaviour. In the meantime, there are thousands of women in need of support for violence against women and that is more than policing – it’s prevention, challenging attitudes, resourcing specialist services and above all listening to and believing women.

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³ *The Cost of Domestic Violence* by Sylvia Walby published by the Women and Equality Unit, Department of Trade and Industry in 2004, from the year 2001-8. and *The Cost of Domestic Violence: Up-date 2009* Sylvia Walby UNESCO Chair in Gender Research, Lancaster University, UK

⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/exclusive-rape-of-vulnerable-women-has-been-effectively-decriminalised-9161336.html>

<http://policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/press-release-metropolitan-police-climb-down-in-undercover-case/>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jun/29/guardian-investigation-abuse-power-police>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/28/john-worboys-victims-met-police-compensation>