



Unit 2.03
Canterbury Court
Kennington Park
1-3 Brixton Road
London SW9 6DE

Tel: 020 7735 2062
Fax: 020 7620 8907
Email: post@eaveshousing.co.uk
www.eaves4women.co.uk

Lord Justice Leveson
The Leveson Inquiry
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London
WC2A 2LL

Dear Lord Justice Leveson,

We are very grateful to have this opportunity to feed into the Leveson Inquiry with some of our concerns regarding press reporting on violence against women.

About Eaves: Eaves Housing is a charity that works on all forms of violence against women. We work to the CEDAW definition of VAW which recognises violence against women as a cause and consequence of continued inequality and discrimination against women and as violence that disproportionately is suffered by women because they are women. It is important to note that domestic violence is only one form of violence against women. Eaves works with women in or exiting prostitution, women trafficked for domestic or sexual labour, young women fleeing family, teenage or gang violence, survivors of rape and sexual assault as well as domestic violence, forced marriage, honour crimes and related issues that are often linked to violence against women such as women with substance abuse issues, mental health problems and in or at risk of homelessness.

Leveson Inquiry concerns: While we recognise that the media acts as a reflection of society and social preferences and norms, it also has a role to help shape, influence, comment on and challenge the status quo. This role is recognised in the international human rights community as well as in journalists' ethical codes of practice.

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22/12/11

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Leveson Inquiry concerns: While we recognise that the media acts as a reflection of society and social preferences and norms, it also has a role to help shape, influence, comment on and challenge the status quo. This role is recognised in the international human rights community as well as in journalists' ethical codes of practice. The Convention on the elimination of discrimination against women (CEDAW) Committee 2008 recommendations to UK noted "with concern the stereotyped media portrayals of women and women's roles in the family and in society, which contribute to women's disadvantaged position in a number of areas, including in the labour market and in access to decision-making positions, and affect women's choices in their studies and professions." The Committee further noted "the lack of positive media portrayals of ethnic and minority women, elderly women and women with disabilities."

Our primary concerns are listed here and addressed in more detail below:

- Failing to ask appropriate, challenging questions, failing to situate the abuse in the wider context of public, political, social and economic dynamics and failing to seek input and expertise from appropriate commentators notably women working on these issues as either frontline staff or as academics, politicians and lawyers
- Invisibility and blaming of Victim and identifying with perpetrator
- Stereotyping and perpetuating myths
- Demonisation of women perpetrators
- New media and disregard for misogynistic, sexist and abusive comment

We would assume that the enquiry may look at the Global Media Monitoring Project report "Who makes the news?" (2005) in which they rightly sum up the importance of the media:

"In today's 24-hour news environment, it matters profoundly who and what is selected to appear in news coverage and how individuals and events are portrayed. Equally it matters who is left out and what is not covered".

We attach links to two reports we have produced on this issue and would encourage you to consider them in addition to this shorter submission:

- Just representation? Press reporting and the reality of rape 2008 by the Lilith research and development team of Eaves Housing
http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Documents/Recent_Reports/Just%20Representation_press_reporting_the_reality_of_rape.pdf
- Press for Change: A guide for journalists reporting on the prostitution and trafficking of women by Julie Bindel
<http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/PRESSPACKgeneric12-06.pdf>

Failing to ask appropriate, challenging questions, failing to situate the abuse in the wider context of public, political, social and economic dynamics and failing to seek input and expertise from appropriate commentators notably women working on these issues as either frontline staff or as academics, politicians and lawyers

When the "riots" happened over the summer or where there is gang violence, there will generally be acres of print about why this happens. Experts, commonly male, from legal, social, political and economic academic disciplines, lawyers, frontline youth workers even American commentators etc are invited to comment, explain and theorise and references are cited. The events are linked to the wider political, economic context and take on an appropriate public importance and decision makers are expected to be concerned about it and take some responsibility for preventing or ending it.

It is almost unheard of that incidences of male violence against women despite being a pattern and continuum of abuse (2 women a week killed by their current or ex partner for instance) provoke this kind of soul searching. They are seen as one-off, private, domestic incidents or "tragedies" that somehow cannot be helped and are inevitable or even normal but sad.

Turning to the 2 cases that happened within a week of each other of men murdering their wife and family.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2071857/Police-inspector-murdered-wife-daughter-probed-similar-case.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-44032/Man-kills-wife-children--shoots-himself.html>

Responsible reporting for such cases should be asking the following questions:

In what proportion of cases does a woman murder her partner and children and in what proportion of cases does a man do so and are their motivations different? How

does this compare to honour crimes that are normally reported from BME communities – is this a western manifestation of an honour crime? Is that a helpful way to look at this or not? Do these two cases signal an upturn in such cases?

There are several questions this can raise. It is in fact predominantly men that do so and so why do they do so and in what circumstances? Do we know enough about this that there may be preventative interventions available? If not, should we not be researching it in order to prevent it?

In fact, there is ample research that shows that the way we construct masculinity means that power, control and status are very key to male identity. When men kill their whole family it is often because the men fail to perceive their wife and children as individuals in their own right but only as an extension of himself – therefore killing himself means killing them. The US writer Charles Patrick Ewing devotes a chapter of *Fatal Families* to describing these cases. Responsible reporting might have included looking at academic research on the issue and consulting such people. In fact these cases not only were not linked in any coverage but no such questions were asked. There was an opinion column but that is quite different to investigative journalism where an editor could have chosen to examine the phenomenon and its implications for our current society.

Once such cases are looked into, it is not uncommon to find that the normal, happy, decent, perfect family was not so perfect but may have been experienced by the wife and children as quite controlling. The circumstances in which a man may do this also are often quite similar – men with depression and illness, who have lost or risk losing their job or wealth and whose marriage has broken down or is at risk and who have been quite protective even controlling of their family are seen as at highest risk of committing this sort of crime. Liz Kelly Chair of End Violence Against Women coalition and professor at LMU Children women abuse studies unit (CWASU) would be an appropriate academic and practitioner expert to consult and has written on such cases in her study: “‘ If only we’d known’: an exploratory study of seven intimate partner homicides in Englestone” (Kelly. L., Regan L.).

In a climate of recession where the stresses and strains on marriages are greater, where people are losing their job and their home and are depressed – it is an interesting question to ask whether or not this may be a warning of a predictable upturn in such cases linked to the climate, whether there is more we can do to challenge how we construct male identity, more we can do to support men so they don't react in this way and to support women to identify risk factors and take necessary steps for their and their children's safety.

I have addressed this point about not asking the right questions and making the right links with specific reference to the recent family murders. However this applies to every incident of violence against women. There are questions that can and should be asked that focus on male behaviour as perpetrators and how we can prevent it. Why do men rape? Which men rape and who do they rape and why? Why do men think they have the right to hit their wives? Why do men feel they have the right to comment on women's appearance and looks in the street and to be offended if a woman doesn't respond as he'd wish her to? Why do men use women in prostitution and which men do and how do they feel about it?

Invisibility of Victim and identifying with the perpetrator

In several instances of reporting where a man is alleged or convicted of having raped, assaulted or murdered a woman, it is quite stark how little information is provided about the victim and yet how much is provided about the alleged

In the same way it is noticeable that there is a disproportionate amount of coverage of the rare and mythical “Stranger rape” scenario with the perfect stereotype of evil, often foreign, stranger leaping out of a bush and the perfect victim stereotype of a nice young woman blamelessly going about her business (i.e. not having been drinking or wearing sexy clothes). This represents less than 8% of rape. Yet there is little or no coverage of marital rape. Acquaintance, date or partner rape is often accompanied with lengthy commentary on the couple knowing each other, what the woman was wearing and how much she had to drink and often what a perfectly ordinary decent chap the man is. There is also disproportionate attention to the relatively rare instances of women alleged to have falsely reported a rape and no examination of what this may mean in reality – such as instances of no criming by the police, women with mental health issues often survivors of sexual abuse, the low conviction rate and high attrition rate as cases are pursued any of which may be relevant factors.

This sort of portrayal is frankly negligent and damaging. It encourages false stereotypes and hierarchies about rape and blames victims. It feeds into whether a victim would feel able to report a rape or not as she can see how she will be judged and disbelieved. It can feed into police, public, jury, CPS and judiciary’s views about what is rape, who is a rapist and who is a victim and can therefore impact on which cases are pursued by the CPS and the likelihood of obtaining convictions so again feeding into whether or not a woman feels she can report it and have justice. This is all covered in more detail in “Just representation? Press reporting and the reality of rape”.

Demonisation of women alleged perpetrators

It is the case that society still holds the assumption that women are and should be the more law-abiding, caring and gentle sex and that therefore when a woman is accused of a crime it seems the more newsworthy and shocking. However, the media play into this and the portrayal of women accused of crime is often excessively demonising and gratuitous. There is also undue attention paid to her private life, her sexual life, her drinking habits – this was amply illustrated by the Rebecca Leighton case that attached a facebook picture of her at a party to the story of her arrest. Similarly the case of Stephanie Knight was reported in a way that entirely obscured the fact that she had been as a child and continued as a young woman to be the victim of abuse as well as having now begun to perpetrate or facilitate it.

<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/869934-nurse-rebecca-leighton-arrested-over-stepping-hill-hospital-deaths>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2011818/Teenager-Stephanie-Knight-lured-2-girls-16-rape-ordeal-3-Asian-men.html>

New Media

There has been a great deal of coverage of the sort of negative comment that women journalists, commenters, posters and bloggers receive when writing as women or particularly when writing on women’s issues and of inappropriate pages like the facebook rape pages. It is acknowledged, even by male commenters, that the abuse women receive is not merely the internet abuse that shouts one down, calls one stupid or wrong but is gendered abuse. There is an excessive amount of reference to the likely looks and sexuality or desirability of the woman and comments suggesting the woman needs to be raped and even adducing addresses and NI numbers to increase the sense of fear and incitement. There seems to be an utter failure to address this by moderators on comment pages or social media or to treat it

seriously as the equivalent racist remarks would be. Yet it is clear that the issue here is resenting and terrorizing women for daring to have and express opinions in the public space on matters of public importance – basic freedom of expression. The New Statesman article “You should have your tongue ripped out” captures this very effectively.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/helen-lewis-hasteley/2011/11/comments-rape-abuse-women>

We will be very happy to provide any further information and we look forward to seeing your recommendations and how they will address these issues. We firmly believe the media have a key role to play in shaping attitudes and so in either preventing or facilitating violence against women.

Heather Harvey
Lilith research and development manager
Eaves Housing for Women



