

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN



men, women and murder

FEBRUARY 2007



Introduction

Page 3 Sharon Akers
Page 4 Tariff Appeals and Legal News
Page 6 Why is rape so easy to get away with?
Page 8 EHMP
Page 9 Letters



Welcome to first London Justice for Women newsletter of 2007.

London Justice for Women was founded in 1991 as a feminist response to cases of women who had been jailed for life for killing their violent male partners. We took up the cases of Sara Thornton and Amelia Rossiter and supported Southall Black Sisters in their campaign for Kiranjit Ahluwalia. Since then, we have had numerous successes:

The cases of Emma Humphreys, Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia changed the law of provocation as a defence to murder in two major ways: Firstly, it is now recognised that there may be a gap between the 'provoking act' and the act of killing and secondly, the concept of 'cumulative provocation' is now widely understood. Previously, the law only reflected men's experience of killing women who had threatened to leave them, were suspected of being 'unfaithful' or were in other ways apparently unbearable to live with.

We intervened in the House of Lords case of *Smith (Morgan James)* because we feared that the gains made in our cases may be undermined.

We continue to be consulted by policy makers and legislators about the reform of law and policy relating to women who kill and domestic violence more broadly.

We raise the issues of men who continue to 'get away with murder' when they kill women with the excuses of her 'infidelity' or 'nagging'.

We are facing many challenges now, however. Recent cases threaten to claw back the gains we have made in the law of homicide and the Law Commission has recommended that women and men who are charged with

homicide where there is provocation or 'diminished responsibility' receive a conviction for "Second degree murder" (see article on the Law Commission in this newsletter).

Although the courts are still, on the whole, not particularly sympathetic to battered women who kill, there have been some recent victories, such as the overturning on appeal of Rose Swan's murder conviction (see Legal News).

We need your help now more than ever to continue our work. In this newsletter you will read more about the recent work we have been doing. Please support us. Later in the year, we will be holding a fund-raising event. Meanwhile, please make a donation or take out a standing order for as much as you can.

Thank you for helping us to help women who are facing violence on a daily basis and those who have had to take the ultimate action against their abusers.

Women Facing Jail Sentences For Reporting Rape.

Justice for Women and the Lilith Project called an emergency meeting in London in December to discuss an urgent problem of the criminalising of complainants of rape.

Increasingly, in cases of rape and sexual assault, where the defendant has been acquitted or the complaint has resulted in no charges or the case has otherwise not been proceeded with, women are being charged with wasting police time or the more serious charge of perverting the course of justice. Many of these women have received prison sentences of up to 12 months, others have been given a formal Caution or named in court, and in one instance discussed in the House of Lords.

With a conviction rate for rape of 5%, such treatment of complainants by the police, the CPS and the courts is disgraceful. The situation is reminiscent of the 1980's when the documentary *A Complaint of Rape* highlighted the appalling treatment of rape complainants by Thames Valley police was covertly

"In a Criminal Justice System where the CPS do not count rape as a Hate Crime, there is not much to be optimistic about".

filmed and resulted in a public outcry. These cases are not just a handful, they are happening all the time, while the police and CPS maintain that they want to increase the very low conviction rate in rape cases.

With the very real threat of being charged with a serious criminal offence should the prosecution of the perpetrator fail, are women going to be encouraged to report rape and sexual assault? In some countries, women who cannot prove that they have been raped are then tried for crimes such as adultery or having sex outside marriage. Is this the way we are heading? In a Criminal Justice System where the CPS do not count rape as a Hate Crime, there is not much to be optimistic about.

There was a very good attendance at the meeting and it was decided that the Lilith Project would coordinate a campaign around this issue, supported by Justice for Women. For further information contact Cat Whitehouse at Cathrine.whitehouse@eaveshousing.co.uk.

Sharon Akers leave to Appeal Granted



Sharon approached Justice for Women after her conviction in May 2004 for the murder of her partner Nick Doolan on 19th October 2003. She had been in a relationship with him for six years during which time she suffered almost constant abuse in the form of manipulation, verbal abuse, sexual abuse and violence. In 1999, Nick Doolan was convicted of an offence of grievous bodily harm on a neighbour and sentenced to imprisonment. He continued to manipulate her whilst he was in custody for example; refusing to speak to her if she saw her friends.

The psychiatrist instructed at her trial diagnosed Sharon as suffering from a borderline personality disorder. As a single parent who working to support herself and her two children, she found it increasingly difficult to cope with the abuse. She was on medication for anxiety and throughout the time that she was involved with Nick Doolan, she made numerous attempts at suicide. She tried moving away but after a short time she agreed to get back together with him. The turmoil of her situation culminated in her children being placed on the at-risk register.

Finally, when they were living together on 5th September 2003, he attacked her and she called the police. Nick Doolan was charged with actual bodily harm. Although the police had been called on many previous occasions and she had made complaints against him, he had always persuaded her to withdraw the allegations.

Sharon sought medical treatment for the injuries which she sustained on 5th September. Nick Doolan was interviewed about the offences but he denied them and sought to blame Sharon.

Between 5th September and 19th October 2003, Sharon sent text messages to Nick Doolan which she has always claimed were in response to messages that he had

sent to her. He sent offensive messages to her mother and attempted to come between Sharon and her

"As a single parent who working to support herself and her two children, she found it increasingly difficult to cope with the abuse".

mother (to whom she had always been very close) by claiming to have slept with her. On 19th October Sharon took a knife to Doolan's house and stabbed him. Sharon was arrested and requested the same solicitors who had represented Nick Doolan in 1999. As far as she was concerned, they had done a good job for him and she was now arrested for attempted murder, the same offence with which he had originally been arrested. She asked the solicitor at the police station whether there was any problem with them representing her on this matter and they advised her that there was not. This was wrong. It was apparent at that stage that Sharon's defence to the charge would turn on the abusive nature of the relationship and on the dynamics between Nick Doolan and herself.

Her solicitors did not, tell her that they were actually representing Nick Doolan on the outstanding charge of actual bodily harm against her as well as on some drugs offences with which he had been arrested at the same time. Neither did they inform her that they had represented him on a previous assault in July 2003 which she had agreed to withdraw.

There was therefore a clear conflict of interest which was not picked up on either by the solicitors or barristers who represented Sharon at her trial. The conflict and the

implications that it had for the trial were not explained to Sharon. In fact, she only found out about it after her conviction when she was looking at a schedule of Nick Doolan's telephone calls and she noticed that he had been making calls to her solicitors between 5th September and 19th October 2003.

At her trial, Sharon's solicitors did not adduce the medical evidence of the injuries that she had sustained on 5th September. Consequently, she was cross-examined on the basis that she had fabricated the assault as well as other assaults which she had referred to in her evidence. This also adversely affected her claim of self-defence in relation to being armed with a knife on 19th October. In addition to this, the solicitors failed to take proper instructions on the text messages that she had sent and so she was entirely unprepared for cross-examination. The text messages which she had received and which Nick Doolan had sent to her family were never recovered. This enabled the prosecution to present a one sided picture of events leading up to the offence.

Justice for Women have helped Sharon find a new legal team. Leave to appeal conviction has been granted by the Court of Appeal and her lawyers hope to argue that the conflict had an adverse effect on the way in which the trial was conducted. A date has not yet been set for the hearing which will be later this year.

A tariff is the minimum term a person must serve when convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. A life sentence prisoner's tariff used to be set by the Home Secretary following recommendations made by the trial judge and Lord Chief Justice. However, following European case law which challenged the setting of tariffs by a politician (who, it was argued, might be more sensitive to public opinion than to the principles of justice when setting tariff), the 2003 Criminal Justice Act, now requires tariffs to be set by the trial judge following conviction. For those cases where a prisoner is serving a life sentence having had their tariff set under the previous regime by the Home Secretary, transitional provisions were introduced whereby the prisoner could make representations and await a pronouncement in open court by a High Court judge on their tariff. The Act directs that a judge must take into account both 'aggravating' and 'mitigating' factors arising from the circumstances surrounding the offence when setting a tariff. The starting point for a murder tariff is 15 years; aggravating factors which lead to an increase in tariff include such things as whether there was some ulterior motive to the killing, such as robbery and whether the victim was particularly vulnerable such as a child or elderly person) or acting in the course of his/her public duty, such as a police officer. Mitigating factors, which could lead to a reduction in the tariff, can include whether the defendant was particularly vulnerable, whether she was suffering from mental disorder (short of 'abnormality of mind' in diminished responsibility defences) that would reduce culpability and whether the Defendant was subjected to a degree of provocation. Thus, most cases Justice for Women support, the woman should receive a significantly below average tariff as the defendant is vulnerable relative to the victim and she has suffered abuse which amounts to 'a degree of

provocation' and often had caused some form of mental disorder. In our experience an average tariff set for 'our' cases is around 12 Years.

Rose Swan Freed on Appeal.

We are delighted to be able to report that Rose Swan has finally won her appeal against conviction.

At the time of our last newsletter, Rose's case had been adjourned for further psychiatric evidence to be obtained. The adjourned hearing was finally heard on 14th December when the Judges fully accepted the defence's argument on Diminished Responsibility, Rose's murder conviction was quashed and she was freed after spending 5 and a half years in prison. Rose was convicted in February 2002 of the murder of John Stevens, a manipulative and violent man who had 'befriended' her at a time in her life when she was particularly vulnerable. He had regularly been violent to her, had taken control of her medication and had admitted raping her on 2 occasions while she was asleep.

With the support of Justice for Women, Rose was finally granted Leave to Appeal in July 2005 but it took a further 17 months for her to be freed, due to various setbacks. Her eventual victory is a triumph for her and the label of 'murderer' is one she no longer has to bear.

Jane Andrews – tariff appeal

At an appeal hearing in October, Jane Andrews' tariff, which had been set at 12 years by the trial judge, was reduced 11 years when the court recognised that tariff setting judge had not applied the law correctly in arriving at the final tariff. It was disappointing however, that the court did not look at the new and compelling psychiatric evidence which had been produced for her appeal against conviction which should have provided further evidence of significantly mitigating factors in her offence. Jane is now

just over half way through her sentence and making good progress in prison, after the devastating setback of her failed appeal against conviction.

Joanne Cole – tariff appeal

Following a disgraceful display of racist and sexist ignorance by the Court of Appeal at Joanne's failed Court of Appeal hearing in May 2005, representations on tariff received a far more sympathetic response from a High Court judge setting her tariff in December 2006. The judge recognised that only mitigating factors applied to the circumstances of her offence and that the new psychiatric evidence produced for her appeal almost certainly reduced her culpability for the offence. In those circumstances he agreed to reduce her tariff from that set by the trial judge of nine years to seven and a half years. This helpful judgment may be a useful precedent for other justice for women cases.

Joanne is potentially up for release in about one year's time, but she faces a further struggle. As she is a 'foreign prisoner' convicted of a very serious offence, she faces deportation to Jamaica. She applied for asylum in the UK but was refused, her appeal was heard whilst she was in prison and unable to arrange for legal representation, not surprisingly it was dismissed. Her appeal received news coverage in Jamaica and as the appeal produced evidence of extensive abuse suffered by her in Jamaica, she fears repercussions if returned there. She is therefore appealing the deportation order.

Christine Devaney sues her former legal team for negligence

In April 2005, Christine Devaney's conviction for the murder of her violent partner was quashed and she was freed on a probation order having served five years in prison. The Court of Appeal allowed her

conviction on the basis that her legal team at trial had failed to obtain a psychiatric report, but that fresh evidence produced at the appeal revealed that her responsibility for the offence was diminished.

In December 2006, Christine's current solicitors (who acted for her at the appeal) issued proceedings at the High Court for a claim in negligence against her former solicitor and QC (the latter is now a sitting judge!).

The failure to obtain a psychiatric report where a woman is facing a murder conviction and there is evidence that she has suffered abuse is a serious omission. In this case, even more so where, as in this case, there was medical evidence to show she had suffered a history of suicide attempts and alcoholism. But for the help of justice for women, who contributed towards the cost of a psychiatric report for her appeal, Christine would still be in prison less than half way through her life sentence (the judge had fixed her tariff at 15 years).

LAW COMMISSION REPORT: 'A new Homicide Act for England and Wales'

The Law Commission published its report on proposals for the reform of Murder in December 2006. In our last Newsletter we wrote about the consultation and submissions made by Justice for Women to that consultation. (A full copy of those submissions can be found on our website).

We were extremely disappointed with the recommendations made in relation to provocation or diminished responsibility defences and the failure to take into account the submissions from Justice for Women and other women's groups. The Law Commission have

proposed, in line with the recommendations in their consultation paper, that there be a new tiered system for homicide offences, to include first and second degree murder, followed by manslaughter in order of descending seriousness. Under the current law we have 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' manslaughter. The former is where somebody may have intended to kill or cause really serious harm but was acting as a result of provocation or diminished responsibility. The latter is where someone killed as a result of some unlawful act not intending to kill or where death resulted as a consequence of the defendant's gross negligence. The Law Commission proposes that killings that are currently classed as voluntary manslaughter should be effectively upgraded to second degree murder and that manslaughter should be limited to lack of intent and gross negligence cases.

If the proposed regime were in operation at the time that Justice for Women fought all their high profile campaigns, then Sara Thornton, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Emma Humphreys would all still be classed as murderers! Whilst it is suggested that second degree murder would not carry the mandatory life sentence and could result in a full range of sentences at the discretion of the judge, taking into account all the circumstances of the killing, we believe it is inevitable that sentences would be lengthier on average than those currently imposed for manslaughter. It is hard to imagine a judge sentencing a woman to a probation order for second degree murder, which is a sentence currently imposed in some the cases justice for women has supported, where there is significant history of abuse suffered by her.

The proposals are all the more disappointing in that they include reforms to the wording of the defence to provocation very much

along the lines we campaigned for. It is proposed that provocation should be limited to gross provocation (thereby potentially excluding the cases where men say they killed because they believed their wife was having an affair or because she nagged him). It is also proposed that provocation be extended to cases where the defendant fears really serious violence, this extending the defence to cases where the killing does not satisfy the strict requirements for self defence. This sensible reform makes no sense if it is proposed to make the offence more serious by raising its status from manslaughter to second degree murder.

What next? The Law Commission proposals are just that and may never become law. The government will need to consider them and decide whether they wish to bring in a new law. It would be a pretty appalling waste of resources if no steps are taken to bring about reform after two lengthy consultation proposals (the present consultation was preceded by a Consultation focussing just on partial defences to murder. On publication of that consultation paper, the government decided to have the second wider consultation on the Homicide Laws).

If the government decide to take this further forward then Justice for Women will need to commence intense lobbying to ensure that whilst the proposed reformed wording to provocation is adopted, that the two defences of provocation and diminished responsibility are not raised to the status of second degree murder.

Why is rape so easy to get away with?

Julie Bindel investigates - (Originally published in The Guardian—February 2007)



"I coped with being raped," says Jane Lewis, who was attacked by a man two years ago at the party where they met, "but I went mad when he was acquitted. That is when I started fantasising about killing him." She later discovered that he had been accused of rape four times previously: twice not charged, and twice acquitted by a jury.

Today, rape might as well be legal. With women frequently accused of making false allegations, and victims who had consumed alcohol blamed for "getting themselves raped", it is a wonder that the conviction rate for reported rapes is as high as the current figure of 5%.

Rape is an everyday occurrence. Research published yesterday by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Home Office Inspectorates estimates that of the 50,000 rapes thought to occur each year, between 75% and 95% are never reported. And almost a third of reported cases recorded by police as "no crime" should have been properly investigated as rape.

If a man commits a rape, then he has, on average, a less than 1% chance of being convicted. Those most likely to result in a conviction are classic stranger rapes, involving a man with a knife who breaks into the victim's home or drags her into the bushes.

Elizabeth Harrison is the manager of the Whitechapel Haven, one of three centres in London that provide a 24-hour service to help anyone who has been recently raped or sexually assaulted. She is all too aware that many rape victims are not believed if they have been drinking. "On the one hand, doctors we use at the Haven are saying these women are too drunk to consent to a medical examination," says Harrison, "but the court is saying that she was not too drunk to consent to sex." I have observed a number of rape trials. One case I sat through concerned a woman

who had met a man at 2am while waiting for the night bus after an evening out with friends. They spoke for five minutes before going on to a grass verge where they had anal and oral sex. She said it was rape. He said she was gagging for it.

She admitted she had drunk six alcopops. The jury acquitted the man. Alcohol seems to have become the new short skirt. The majority of cases resulting in an acquittal now involve a complainant who had been drinking. And despite

"She admitted she had drunk six alcopops. The jury acquitted the man".

changes to both legislation and court conduct over the past 30 years, conviction rates continue to plummet. How can that be?

Nicole Westmarland, chair of the Rape Crisis Federation, believes that the main obstacle to convicting rapists is the stereotypes about the crime.

"Those responsible in the criminal justice system know that everything has been done with the process and legislation," she says, "and we are now at a really dangerous place where they might start to look at measures such as restorative justice, or downgrading 'date rape' and differentiating it from what many see as 'real' rape, involving a stranger and a back alley."

"People do know that rape is very common," agrees Harrison, "but many people - including those on juries - protect themselves by thinking, 'I would have fought him off' or 'The men I know wouldn't do that.' If you start accepting that you can't stop it happening to you, or that the nice man you work with might be capable of doing it, that's

when it gets frightening."

The CPS will only take a case to court if it has a "reasonable chance of conviction". This means that those cases that fit the stereotype - such as stranger rapes - take precedence over the more commonplace ones. Yet often women say that being raped by a man they love and trust hurts more than being attacked by a man they will never see again.

"If cases that appear difficult to win do not get to court," says Hamish Brown, a retired senior police officer and expert on sexual violence, "then jurors will never get the chance to become educated about those more complicated cases that rarely go forward." Despite this, Brown admits that in cases where it is simply "her word against his", he would usually decide not to charge. "If there is too much in the defence's favour, such as she was carrying condoms, it is unlikely to result in a conviction."

What is going wrong? Police deal with rape within a culture of suspicion. Despite feminists heaping praise on the police since they improved their approach to victims from the bad old days of the 70s and 80s, response to rape is still patchy and, at times, unacceptable. A Channel 4 documentary, screened last year, portrayed some officers as lazy and sexist and an allegation of rape by a prostitute as being treated lightly.

Dave Gee, vice-chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers working group on rape, admits that while some forces have made "great strides" towards improving victim care and rape investigation, others stand still. "There are still problems with some police attitudes around rape," says Gee, "because police officers can take on board the stereotypes that a lot of the general public do about rape."

Accusations and press reports of women making false allegations

Why is rape so easy to get away with?

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have been widespread recently, and yet the most up-to-date research on this shows that false rape allegations are no higher than in any other crime, and stand at around 3%, although police officers questioned in the same report assumed 23% were false. One academic who has written extensively about false allegations of rape says his students believe that half of all rape complaints are false.

There are many calls for women to be harshly treated if they appear to be lying about rape. At the moment, these voices seem louder than those calling for justice for the thousands of rape victims who do not see their attacker dealt with by the law. Last year a Labour Peer, Lord Campbell-Savours, used parliamentary privilege to name a woman during a debate on rape legislation, calling her "a serial and repeated liar" after a man found guilty of raping her had his conviction overturned. The woman neither admitted nor was charged with making a false allegation.

"Some women who report rape risk heavy penalties in the civil courts".

Many tabloid newspapers have joined in, giving the impression that rape is simply a figment of mad women's imaginations.

Some women who report rape can end up in the dock. Last year, a teenager who reported being raped by three men in a park was cautioned by police for perverting the course of justice after the accused showed footage from a mobile phone of the victim engaging in sexual activity with one of the men. "It proved nothing," she tells me, "except that they were filming the rape for porn." Police have since wiped the caution after

the victim challenged it. Previous allegations can influence whether or not police and jurors decide if the complainant is lying. The horrific consequence of this attitude is that women raped more than once who report attacks to the police are even less likely to get justice than others. Complainants who the police or courts decide

"I have witnessed defence lawyers badgering women with questions about their sexual activity while judges and prosecutors do nothing to stop them".

have lied could be named, and there are now even calls for their DNA to be filed in case of future reports of rape.

Some women who report rape risk heavy penalties in the civil courts. Lucy Green is one of a number of women sued for slander in the past decade after the men they accused were either not charged or acquitted in court.

"All of a sudden I was in court as a defendant, not a victim of rape, which I had been prepared to endure. I was so scared I wet myself on several occasions during cross-examination."

The jury was divided and gave a hung verdict. "If he had won I would have been forced to make a public apology and pay him money for raping me."

Not only are women who report rape routinely viewed as liars; it would seem that once a woman becomes sexually active she is no longer allowed to say "no" on subsequent occasions. Despite legislation introduced in 1999 to restrict defence barristers from raising a complainant's sexual history in court, judges all too often

allow them to get away with it. I have witnessed defence lawyers badgering women with questions about their sexual activity while judges and prosecutors do nothing to stop them.

For the many women who do not receive justice, the only route left open can be claiming criminal injuries compensation (CIC). Judith Scott was raped at knife-point in 1983, and three years later picked a man called David Mulcahy out of an identification parade. But the procedure was compromised and the police were forced to release him. He was eventually arrested, more than 10 years later, after the notorious "railway rapist", John Duffy, identified him as his partner. By then, Mulcahy had raped at least 12 more women and killed three.

Having battled with years of trauma as a result of the rape, and misplaced guilt at Mulcahy remaining free to rape and kill other women, she attended the trial, despite the fact that the CPS had decided not to pursue him for her rape. "I wanted some kind of closure for myself," says Scott, "and obviously found sitting through the trial very, very difficult."

After Mulcahy's arrest, Scott was advised by the police to apply for compensation, and was examined by a psychiatrist hired by the CIC board, who concluded that she had "brought on her own trauma" by choosing to attend the trial. She says the board adjudicator, recommending that Scott should not be paid any additional compensation for trauma and loss of earnings (at the time of the rape, she was an aspiring dancer), asked her why she "went back for more".

"The whole process was like a re-enactment of the rape," says Scott, "with some abusive man wielding power over me."

Why is rape so easy to get away with?

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Although the top payout for rape at the time was £7,500, (recently raised to £11,000), far bigger sums have been awarded to men who said they were falsely accused. Being accused of rape is seen as more serious and damaging than being raped, and yet research shows that levels of post-traumatic stress disorder is higher amongst rape victims than war veterans.

What needs to be done? Not, says Harrison, government advertising campaigns that warn men they will go to prison if they commit rape, such as the one run in lads' mags last year. "These men are aware that the likelihood is they won't even get charged, let alone convicted," she says. Police, the CPS and campaigning organisations all say that changes need to take place outside the courtroom, such as education programmes to debunk the myths about rape. "It is the responsibility of the government to educate potential jurors that all rape is real rape," says Lewis, "because at the moment, most

"He had dragged a 15-year-old girl down an alley and assaulted her".

rapists know they are very unlikely to be punished."

In 1998, a headline appeared in the local Grimsby weekly: "Man faces rape charge". He had dragged a 15-year-old girl down an alley and assaulted her. The CPS decided not to pursue the case. That man was Ian Huntley. At the time, he was not seen as a danger to the public, and neither are the majority of other "opportunistic" rapists who get away with it.

One victim of rape, the feminist writer Andrea Dworkin, once said

that women and children were not protected by the law as it stood from "men who rape, rape, rape", and would have to take the law into their own hands if justice was ever to be done. "Women should get guns and should be allowed to use them to defend themselves," she said. If women continue to be denied justice, there will be many who agree with her.

Some names have been changed.



The Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize was set up to commemorate the life and work of Emma Humphreys. Emma died aged 30 in 1998, just three years after successfully challenging her murder conviction supported by Justice for Women and other feminist campaigners.

Commemorative awards are made annually in Emma's name to women and groups who have done exceptional work to combat violence against women and children, and have raised awareness of this issue, whether through writing, campaigning or activism. The aim of the individual prize and the group award is to recognise and reward outstanding and often unsung contributions to the fight against violence against women and children.

The winners of the 2006 prizes were:

Individual: Comfort Momoh

Comfort is a public health specialist who campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation. She is the only FGM specialist midwife in the UK. Comfort established and runs the African Well Woman's Clinic, pro-

viding information, counselling and remedial surgical procedures for women who have undergone FGM.

Group: Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) at Asylum Aid

The Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) was established by Asylum Aid - a charity providing free legal advice and representation to people seeking asylum - with the aim of addressing the ingrained gender discrimination experienced by women asylum-seekers. The RWRP's most recent research ('Lip Service or implementation?': Asylum Aid, March 2006) exposed the Home Office's failures to implement its own policy guidelines for dealing with women's asylum claims. See www.asylumaid.org.uk

Special Prize: Nadia Siddiqui

Nadia is a founder member of Refuge Space for Asian Women. She has worked in the community for 30 years, supporting and working with Asian women experiencing domestic violence and around the abduction of children to Islamic states. Nominations are now open for the 2007 prize. Please see the ehmp web-site at

<http://www.emmahumphreys.org>
or

e-mail
joanscanlon@britishlibrary.net

Letters of Complaint



Ref: Corr07/JFW/CS

19th January 2007

Anthony Salz
Acting BBC Chairman
BBC Complaints
PO Box 1922

Glasgow G2 3WT

Dear Mr Salz,

Re: BBC 2 planned programme The Verdict 'celebrity rape trial'

We are very disappointed that the BBC has decided to produce a show that will damage victims of rape by using 'celebrities' as a jury based on a replicated trial that involved celebrity defendants. This will trivialise the issue of sexual violence against women. The BBC are acting very irresponsibly and we are writing to strongly advise you make an ethical choice and cancel the programme you plan to air in early February. There has been no thought whatsoever for the victims of rape. We are frankly disgusted with the BBC and feel you have sunk to an all time low.

If the BBC had wanted to do a serious programme on rape, then we would have welcomed and supported it. The case you have chosen is a 'celebrity case' which has been based on two footballers and a young woman in a hotel, this is a scenario echoing the gang-rape allegations made during a case 2003. If the BBC had wanted to raise serious issues around rape cases then it would have not have chosen this sensational case, and would have used 12 members of the public rather than celebrities like Stan Collymore, who has a terrible personal record on violence against women, he was charged and bailed in 2004 with making threats to kill his wife and has also attacked his previous partner Ulrika Jonsson.

It is not a serious programme and will not help victims of rape and may even deter women from reporting this violent crime. We all want to understand what happens in the jury room and courts and why the conviction rate for rape is so low and continues to fall. If the BBC goes ahead and shows this despicable programme then you, the BBC, have chosen to sensationalise and damage victims of rape further and trivialise violence against women. We are going to launch a campaign against the BBC, along with other women's groups. We cannot allow the BBC to show a reality television programme that will further trivialise the trauma that rape victims undergo. We look forward to your prompt response and withdrawal of the programme.

Yours sincerely,

Justice for Women