

## Anonymity for those accused of sex offences?

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The debate, about whether suspects in sex cases should retain their anonymity, continues. Maura McGowan, chairman of the Bar Council and a deputy High Court judge, says it is terribly unfair for suspects to be smeared with the stigma when they are eventually acquitted or, indeed, never charged. Many commentators agree; some disagree, even the magnificent Carol Sarler, who feels both the accuser and the accused should be named.

But nobody asks those who have suffered from this and, further, nobody seems to put forward the best reason NOT to publicise the name of the accused. I am one of those. Many will consider that a very good reason to have revealed my name. The police adore the publicity because it provokes other people to come forward. It makes their investigation far easier.

I was and remain innocent of my convictions. I'm still fighting to get my appeal heard. I discovered to my horror that people DO make false allegations. If the massive publicity about the false allegations made against me in my case (the initial ones were ordered abandoned by the judge during my trials) had not been carried on the front pages, I would never have been prosecuted, let alone convicted. It was "Trawl by media". I was not "innocent until proven guilty". I was considered guilty (it was a better story) and, as a direct result, found guilty - although found innocent in a second trial, something generally ignored by the media.

Quite often, "similar" allegations only share similarities because they have shared details published in the media. Some are "assisted" in their recollections by helpful police interviewers, whether intentionally or unintentionally. I was given seven years for crimes of which the guidelines suggested sentences of two years. But those crimes never happened. It wasn't that I was found guilty of crimes I didn't commit. They never happened.

People do make fake or inflated claims, when prompted by media publicity. Contrary to the accepted wisdom, people DO lie.

We are now witnessing a huge amount of celebrity cases of historical sexual abuse. Thirteen years ago, when this happened to me, I predicted this but I never anticipated that it would take a dead man to provoke them. Foolishly, I failed to realise that you cannot libel the dead or suffer the consequences. Vast sums of money in media fees for interviews, compensation and other temptations now encourage fantasy, invention and - most common of all - exaggeration.

So we now have a situation where a partner in sex from 30 years ago can accuse YOU of rape or under age activity and be virtually assured of about £50,000, whether true or false. Or even someone you simply met and DIDN'T have sex with. Or someone you never even met. Particularly if you are dead - it's a goldmine. Joy for police; virtually guaranteed convictions and kudos for very little effort. The policeman in charge of my prosecution, DCI Marjoram, was given, as a reward, the Milly Dowler case to head up. Several fruitless years later another police force found her killer and Marjoram left the Surrey Force. Two other innocent girls were killed by Levi Belfield during that time.

The ramifications of the false allegations industry are immense. But there is one thing in its favour. One reason to keep the status quo every time.

It's a great story.