

It's not just a few 'Rotten Apples' that perpetrate sexual violence



After each new breaking story about sexual violence, it seems we forget again: sexual violence is a pervasive problem and reporting it is difficult. It's time to definitively break the silence, and stop leaving survivors like herself to their lot, write Claudia Dictus, advisor and survivor.

[Claudia Dictus](#) 31 januari 2022, 06:41

It should not still surprise us. Not what happened at *The Voice*, nor the fact that it was covered up. The fact that the whole country is still talking about it on the other hand is very interesting, considering allegations of sexual violence in other sectors and institutions (like universities) are usually forgotten after a day or two.

Looking at it from a distance, I think I understand. The 'viral' potential of taking down a 'star' and their famous wife is much more interesting to media outlets than covering the story of that one neighbor or teacher.

What is so striking about all this is the way we as a society have begun to anticipate and even dismiss the way that men with power will use it to abuse those over whom they have power. Just like we all treat bodily integrity as less important than the reputation of the perpetrator.

Crooked Logic

Where does this crooked logic come from? It's a myth that perpetrators of sexual violence are all evil monsters: the hypothetical creepy guy in the bushes. Because if we believe that, we can feel safe: it won't happen to us or our loved ones.

The same reasoning is behind the act of victim blaming (claiming the victim is at fault). It places the cause outside of ourselves. So when another name comes to light we feel we must either prove that this person is 'evil itself' or we blame the victim. And in that narrative, survivors are still only an object that is spoken about, leaving them unheard even now.

As a society, we don't want to believe even good people do bad things, like that nice teacher, that athlete, popstar or room-mate. Yet a third of Dutch women have experienced sexual violence, and nearly half have experienced severe sexual harassment. We've known that since 2009.

It came up again in research in 2018 with the report of the Rutgers research institute. But the headlines that followed were all about the way the majority of people in their twenties are satisfied with their sex-lives. If so, many women have such experiences, we can assume that this is not a question of a few 'bad apples.' This is a structural, cultural, social problem that we all have to fight to change.

We can place the blame with the company behind The Voice, that could indeed have had better support structures in place, but the same problem exists in nearly every university and company in the country. Rather than talking about reporting, maybe we should think about prevention.

The Dutch Law and 'use of force'

The question arises how you actually go about reporting the case when it's someone you know. If you report your room-mate and suddenly you're the one who's homeless. And that's assuming you manage to make a case, which is made almost impossible by the shortage of police officers, the painful process itself and the fact that according to Dutch law you have to prove the 'use of force' to qualify.

Moreover, why is it that we never talk about how the Netherlands is severely behind the rest of the EU when it comes to gender equality? For instance, relating to the wage-gap between men and women, or indeed the way we deal with sexual violence.

Maybe we need to break the silence and the taboo around this issue for good, and not lose interest as soon as the outrage fades. For all survivors, and for my younger self I ask you: don't abandon us to this.