



## Our Values & Internalised Victim Blaming: An Open Discussion

Where do our values come from? Mine were instilled by my relatives, primary carers, educators and peers. These values contribute to how we view domestic & sexual violence and abuse; they contribute to those internalised views that we hold, and those that we externalise to others.

How many of us can honestly say, (and I mean absolutely honestly) when we read a report about a stranger rape in an area that isn't well lit or when the woman has been drinking, that we don't, (or haven't, at some point) have an amount, however small, of victim blaming in our thoughts? We might think 'If only she'd got a taxi' or 'alcohol makes women so vulnerable'. If we hear of a domestic homicide, we might think 'If only she had left him'.

Reactions such as this are immediate, almost like a brain reflex meant to keep us 'safe' from harm. We'll be 'safe' if we don't behave as she did. We'll be 'safe' if we avoid those areas. We'll be 'safe' as long as we don't associate with 'those' sorts of men.

Those first thoughts are linked to our values, what we hold to be true from a very young age. The messages that we are taught start from birth, we are told that girls are 'quiet' and 'compliant' and that 'boys will be boys' or 'aggressive'. These messages contribute to victim blaming, in its many forms. Some forms may be less overt than others - the comment such as 'he's such a nice guy - are you sure he meant to do that?' Or, they may be easier to spot; 'if he keeps abusing her, why doesn't she just leave?' We have many examples of varying degrees of victim blaming on our site. They may vary in severity, but what doesn't vary is the harm that is done to survivors.

The values I had as a child and young woman are not the same values that I hold now - I read about cultures other than my own, I questioned the views held by those around me, I challenged my thinking & met other women who made me question my beliefs. Alongside this, as a child who was sexually abused, I wanted to relieve myself of the guilt I held for the abuse that was perpetrated against me. Shedding these internalised messages or values, wasn't easy for me. It's much easier to think that those who have experienced abuse should somehow have been able to prevent it, or even avoid it in the first place. It is also constant 'work in progress' - campaigns such as this one work to challenge those messages, and to reframe our thinking.

What makes us think that survivors should take responsibility for abuse perpetrated against them? This almost exclusively happens when discussing domestic & sexual violence - the assumption that, at some point in time, the survivor 'did' or 'didn't do' something that caused the perpetrator to commit the offence.

Acknowledging that men (and it usually is men) abuse women & other men, in such great numbers both because they can, and because they choose to, is a difficult thing to do. It means we may have to look at all of our values in relation to DSVVA, and how they fit with the societal messages that we continue to absorb throughout the whole of our lives.



It feels like an uphill struggle, when we see [Children's Services blaming children for abuse](#) that may be perpetrated against them. We see police not taking allegations seriously, as in the [Oxford Gang case](#).

We are heartened when we read a news report of a domestic homicide and the [victim blaming defence isn't included](#), but are disheartened when we know it is one report, in a sea of many other damaging ones.

How do we deal with this issue? Raising awareness via a [safe space to share experiences](#) is a step forward, but it isn't a solution.

We need to reframe the values held about women and girls who have experienced domestic & sexual violence and abuse. We need to question where those values originate, and change them. We need to campaign for organisations to take the issue of DSVAs seriously. We need the curriculum to include Sex & Relationship education. We need organisations to acknowledge the need for change, commit to it, and to invest in training & culture change. We need to challenge the myths around DSVAs that contribute to victim blaming.

What are your thoughts? Any advice for us as campaigners? We appreciate all thoughts, ideas and suggestions and you can include them in the comments below.