



Studio 10 and institutionalised victim blaming by @SianSteans

I was today saddened by the level of victim blaming given air time and a veneer of respectability by the panel discussion on Studio 10 (*in Australia*) supposedly about a new law which could be used to prosecute and jail (for 3 years) those who do not report child abuse and/or child sexual abuse.

The panel discussed few details of the law, why it is needed, who it will benefit and how it was designed, who consulted and helped shape it, etc. This was mainly an opportunity to examine how women who do not leave abusive partners are to blame if these partners also go on to abuse any children in the abusive household.

The law makes an allowance for women who are in fear of their own lives. These women are still subject to mandatory reporting to protect children but may not face jail. This ultimately depends on judges and juries deciding on how much fear they were in and balancing this against the risk to their children. It appears the risk to themselves is a mitigating circumstance in the law not something which will protect women from prosecution. This wasn't really important to anyone on the panel. The overarching theme was well if these women won't leave, something must be done to make them. Even the threat of jail is good if it forces these women to contact appropriate services. There was no understanding of how difficult accessing services is regardless of reporting. There was no mention of how the most dangerous time for a women in an abusive relationship is when she leaves. Only talk of how these women need to be made to leave because of the safety of their children. I can't count now many times the phrase 'these women' was used. This in itself is a way of othering survivors. Separating them and isolating them

The panel was made up of 3 women and 1 man. Jessica Rowe, Ita Buttrose, Sarah Harris and Joe Hildebrand. None were representatives of victim support groups or government agencies. None were academics who were there to represent current research on the area. During the panel discussion there was no voice given to with those working with survivors or survivors themselves though Sarah Harris mentioned being close to abusive situations as a child and again as an adult.

This section was followed by an interview via video with Rosie Batty. She was clearly upset from the outset and responded directly to Joe Hildebrand, challenging the victim blaming he had demonstrated during the panel discussion. This section was extraordinarily upsetting for myself and I imagine any survivor who had gotten this far without switching off. It was distressing to see the grace and humility shown by a survivor who lost her son through male violence be mansplained to. There is no other way to describe the condescension and stubbornness shown during this section.

Rosie was given fair time to speak and she emphasised the need for people to educate



themselves on the reality of domestic violence, control and abuse. She also demonstrated her extensive knowledge which evidently was more than the panel on the changes she has been campaigning for. She was hoping for more progressive changes and like victim support groups in Victoria is let down by this law. It was sad to see Joe Hildebrand attempt to 'reason' with her by explaining what the law is for and how it will help children for example in institutions where abuse of children is rife. The panel discussion had only discussed 'these women' yet when confronted with one of 'these women' the nature of the conversation changed to catholic priests and the Salvation Army. It was misguided at best and a deliberate derailing tactic used to undermine the position of Rosie Batty at worst.

I feel all of the panel need to strongly examine their roles in this horrible situation but more so the producers of the show ought to consider whether the lived experience of millions of women is an appropriate topic for a panel debate. If so then the panel should always include voices representing survivors if not survivors themselves. Victim blaming language was given free reign to further entrench these ideas and behaviours before being challenged by a single, strong yet distraught survivor. Against 4 collected, sympathetic yet naive media voices.