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In This  
Issue

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*A Digest of Current Social Information*

## News Briefing No. 76. November 2014

### • IT'S NOT CRICKET

### • THE LAW OF UNFORSEEN CONSEQUENCES

### • COMMENTS

### • FEEDBACK

### • REMEMBRANCE EXTENDS BEYOND THOSE SACRIFICED IN WAR

### • THE HOUSING DEFICIT

### • DEATH CAFÉS

### • SILENT EPIDEMIC OF HUNGER AMONG BRITAIN'S CHILDREN

### • DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### • SELECTIONS FROM THE GUARDIAN

### • WE HATE NO.82: SEXUAL ABUSE

#### IT'S NOT CRICKET

I try, apart from avoiding defamation (though frequently tempted), to say what I think, even if swimming against the tide. I feel that the death of cricketer Phillip Hughes demands such a response. The general tenor of opinion from sportspeople and commentators is that the game must go on, that risk is a part of that game, bouncers are exciting, and in the present case bowler and batsman were simply doing their job. My view is rather different. Of course, there are risks in most sports: some more than others; but they may or may not be acceptable. That's why the Grand National fences were trimmed. During my national service (1947/49) I served on the same unit as Brian Statham. His success in RAF cricket matches was prodigious, and was followed by an illustrious career with Lancashire CC. His bowling was fast and accurate. I cannot recall that he bowled bouncers.

Harold Larwood has quite a lot for which to answer. In his day, his 'bodyline' bowling caused a storm of protest. More recently, however, very fast, short-pitched bowling has become an attack of choice and aggressive intent has come to be seen as OK. As I recall, twenty years ago batsman didn't wear helmets, though matches were keenly fought and public interest was no less intense than today. The riskiest place on the field was at short-leg, and anyone fielding there took a calculated risk. Gradually, somewhat because of the pace of Jeff Thomson, Dennis Lillie and others, batsmen began to resort to the wearing of helmets, and fast, head-height, bowling came to be accepted as legitimate: its deployment seen as a weapon to intimidate batsmen towards the goal of winning. I have no doubt that the unfortunate Sean Abbott thought it legitimate. I think it is time to think again.

My friend John Beasley reminds me that the famous divine, Lord Soper, was in his youth a fast bowler. In a match of no importance, he had the misfortune to hit an opposing batsman with a ball that struck above the heart, resulting in his opponent's death. Soper never bowled quickly again. Perhaps, in the order of things, no sport is of such importance as to allow for avoidable death.

#### THE LAW OF UNFORSEEN CONSEQUENCES

A friend has loaned me a copy of Malcolm Muggeridge's 1972 *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, introducing me to his boyhood simile of a train going along very fast and, to the satisfaction of the passengers, racing through the small stations without stopping. Until they realised that it was not going to stop at *their* stations, when first dismay, and then panic fury, set in. He came to see that this was the story he had been writing ever



since: the story of our time; and, I would add, the story of Iraq, Afghanistan and so on, for ever and ever.

## COMMENTS

Is not space tourism the ultimate vanity? A project to satisfy a lust for vacuous indulgence at obscene cost, when much humankind is scratching for basic sustenance? And this when, presumably, the experience can be simulated. (DK)

There was a discussion on LBD today concerning the terrorist sleeper cell coverage in the papers. One caller, a well spoken male, argued for ID cards to be brought in. He did not care how much information was contained on the cards and said that those who opposed ID cards “should be investigated”.

He wanted the card to be free, against Labour policy to charge for it. This man had spent £40 on a Citizen card that Labour had introduced - to me he wasted his money. Idiot.

The presenter missed the opportunity of asking him whether government databases were accurate enough to make the card effective, when it would be produced to prove identity, how it would prevent terrorism, what would happen as regards temporary visitors, how good the authorities would be on replacing lost/stolen cards, and whether we would become a “show me your papers” nation, with police harvesting ID details of those who go to protest demonstrations (as they have said they would). (PS, 24 November)

David Cameron, on behalf of the Conservative Party, to combat the UKIP menace, and in pursuit of electoral gain, has proposed changes in the benefits system in order to make Britain less attractive to EU migrants. Well he has certainly succeeded in making Britain less attractive for millions of British citizens. (DK)

## FEEDBACK

### From Dr. Richard Lansdown

Thank you for *News Briefing no.75*. The only part on which I can comment with any real knowledge is on mental health provision, in particular for children and young people.

In my young professional days, i.e. the early 1970s, we had Child Guidance Clinics and hospital psychiatry departments. I worked in both.

Treatment offered then was less sophisticated than now but the system was very much better because it depended on the staff running the departments, rather than, as now, being dictated by managers and bureaucrats.

For example: if we received a phone call to the Child Guidance Clinic from a GP or a school or a social worker we could, if we thought it necessary, see the child within 24 hours, or, very occasionally, immediately. And we accepted referrals without their being given a label. Similarly, when I was at Great Ormond Street, we could see children as emergencies within a few days.

I am out of date on hospital departments but I have some knowledge of Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and the picture I get is dismal for three reasons.

One is that referrals have to fit into a diagnostic category. It is no use a social worker phoning about a child who he or she is worried about in general, it is necessary to refer one with ADHD or whatever.

Two is the pattern that has been reported to me of Local Authorities making senior staff redundant and employing less experienced staff on lower salaries.

Three is the long waiting lists, months before even an appointment letter is sent. I could go on.....

### From John Beasley

The last News Briefing included the appalling story of Jean Davies who had vigorously campaigned for assisted dying to be legalised. She died aged 86 five weeks after stopping eating and a fortnight after deciding to stop drinking water. She told the Sunday Times that her experience was “hell”.

I often say that I have the lowest pain threshold in the universe, so I too believe that assisted dying should be legalised – with all the necessary safeguards to prevent abuse by, for example, those who would want people to die sooner rather than later so they could inherit money or property more quickly.

Which organisations are campaigning on this important issue and why aren't they being successful?

Another item in the News Briefing interested me – that NHS England is offering to pay GPs £55 every time they diagnose dementia in a patient in the six months to March 2015. When I recently went to my surgery to discuss my diabetes with the pharmacist he asked me what the date was. As I had recently celebrated my 70th birthday I asked him why I needed to know the date as I wear a watch that provides me

with that information whenever I need it.

It is important that dementia is diagnosed as soon as possible, but it is vital that doctors ask appropriate questions. When I was 14 one of my teachers wrote in my school report about my bad memory!

**[John Beasley is a Methodist lay preacher]**

**From Peter Salter:**

Suicide is a crime here still; one unsuccessful person sent to jail for a month.

## **REMEMBRANCE EXTENDS BEYOND THOSE SACRIFICED IN WAR**

Writing in the e.mail newsletter of RoadPeace, Chair Cynthia Barlow, says:

“On World Day of Remembrance we stand together to remember the millions of people who have been killed on the world’s roads. We know that excessive and inappropriate speed causes road death and injuries; and we also know that when speeds are reduced, the number and severity of crashes are also reduced. So today we call on decision makers and car manufacturers to do all that they can to design out speeding. Until this happens our loved ones will continue to be killed in foreseeable and avoidable crashes.”

## **THE HOUSING DEFICIT**

A report by Aspire, a charity for people with spinal cord injury, has found that some 24,000 wheelchair users in England are still waiting for appropriate social or affordable housing.

(from Livability)

## **DEATH CAFÉS**

are being established across the world, predominantly in North America and Europe, prompted by a shared belief in the importance and value of talking about death. The idea is to break the taboo about discussing feelings around our mortality, and to provide a setting in which interested people can chat frankly, raising their awareness of the issues around their inevitable passing, and encouraging them to make the most of the rest of their (finite) lives.

In London, Jon Underwood is leading on a project to set up an English death café. Go to [deathcafe.com](http://deathcafe.com) for more.

## **SILENT EPIDEMIC OF HUNGER AMONG BRITAIN'S CHILDREN**

On 16 November, on BBC News, Adrian Goldberg voiced concerns raised by the charity Kids Company that an increasing number of children (50% more than two years ago) were coming to its centres with shocking indications of severe malnutrition. No one knows the full extent of this malaise across the country, but teachers experience it as a present reality. Goldberg said that increased living costs and stagnant wages mean that a growing number of parents simply can't afford to put food on the table, and a paediatrician confirmed that hundreds of children are being treated in hospital for malnutrition. They may present with other ailments, but hunger is found to be a factor. And the incidence of food poverty is likely to be much greater than those identified in the NHS. The report of a parliamentary inquiry is expected next month.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

is high on the agenda in the London Borough of Southwark. A meeting hosted by The Guardian's Zoe Williams on 29 November brought together local agencies working together to combat this all too common form of abuse.

- The Domestic Violence Intervention Project, now recognised as one of the UK's foremost authorities on tackling the problem of violence in relationships, supports women and challenges men, the predominant aggressors. It aims to provide mandated perpetrator programmes without recourse to the courts, and with a strong regard for the safety of children.
- Southwark Council, which has a pro-active role, has developed a strategy aimed at creating a culture that ensures women of all ages and backgrounds share a borough which is safe in which to live, work and travel. It recognises that nationally a quarter of all violent crime is related to domestic abuse, and that 70% of high risk victims have children. In Southwark, ethnic factors – honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage – play a small but significant part. Five 'Victim Care Points' have been set up across the borough, with a focus on high risk cases and preventative

measures developed in collaboration with key players, and a campaign to raise awareness.

- A project run by the Great Initiative is using innovative ways to take a message of the need for respect in relationships into our schools.
- In all this work to protect victims, the police play a vital role, conscious that there was a 17% increase in reported domestic abuse offences in 2013/14. In Southwark, 41 domestic abuse cases are reported to the police every week. Women are the victims in three quarters of these incidents, and in a third of cases the abuse occurred in the presence of children. Partnership Inspector Jenny Donaldson stressed the importance of recognising the signs. There are many indicators: intimidation, emotional pressure, isolation, minimising, denying, blaming, involving children, assuming male privilege, economic control, coercion and threatening behaviour. The Metropolitan Police now offers advice and support to victims of crime and their families, and is actively promoting available support services.

This picture relates to one borough. It is London-centric. But it has powerful relevance across Britain. It would be interesting if my concerned readers checked out what is happening in their own localities.

## SELECTIONS FROM THE GUARDIAN

**30 October:** Researchers at the University of Montreal suggest that the frequency of ejaculation which Casanovas tend to enjoy (or who take matters into their own hands) may protect men from prostate cancer. Reporter Archie Bland cynically comments that it's a way of ensuring that your lonely old age spent wishing that someone would call will last even longer. (G2)

Suzanne Moore argues that it must be possible to accept anxiety about immigration without talking about asylum seekers as if they were a virus. (G2)

**1 November:** The turnout in the election of a new Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, following the resignation of Shaun Wright, was a meagre 14.53%. [Something which surely calls into question the whole idea of elected police commissioners.]

**4 November:** The UK's non-mandatory 'living wage' has been increased to £9.15 an hour (London); £7.85 (elsewhere). But Polly Toynbee comments that there is "a growing army of 5.28 million – the 22% - paid less than a living wage to keep body and soul together."

**6 November:** A study by a team from Oxford University finds that upward social mobility has become less common in the last four decades as opportunities for 'top-end' jobs have declined.

**7 November:** The National Audit Office's third report on NHS finances paints an alarming picture, with many trusts increasingly in deficit. The number of foundation trusts in deficit has doubled, while the gross deficit of NHS and foundation trusts has increased by 150%. Margaret Hodge, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, described the report as "deeply alarming" and showed that the sustainability of the NHS is at risk.

After years in which deaths from road crashes have gone down, figures for the first two quarters of 2014 have worsened, prompting fears that cutbacks have impacted on road safety.

Investigations of alleged sexual abuse by the entertainer, Jimmy Savile, have been extended to 41 hospitals.

**8 November:** Sales of green vegetables are soaring. [Perhaps the case against meat is being heeded.]

Pressure on Ed Miliband to step down as leader of the Labour Party is intensifying. [But is there not a wider malaise in the party? I despair at the failure to present a robust alternative to Conservative policies.]

Hugh Muir argues that Eleanor de Freitas's suicide underlines the need for a more humane approach to the handling of rape allegations.

**10 November:** Paul Mason senses that we have reached a tipping point in our attitudes to wage stagnation. He feels that the public mood is ready to change. (G2)

Juliette Jowit quotes a psychiatrist, Tim Cantopher, in a statement of huge and fundamental importance: "Depressive illness is not a psychological or an emotional state and is not a mental illness. It is a physical illness." Sufferers may wish to read the whole article in the Guardian's Journal section, which draws attention to the fact that current mental health services are woefully inadequate.

**11 November:** Research shows that only 3.4% of senior coaching positions across the football leagues are held by people from a BME background. Helping to launch the findings, Gordon Taylor, CEO of the Professional Footballers' Association, argued that steps were needed to redress a blatant imbalance: "You can have top class black managers like you can have top class black players". [Quite so, but it would be a mistake

to equate the skills needed as a player with those of a modern manager.] (Sport)

A front page article reveals that Civil Service permanent secretaries have been asked to plan for extra departmental cuts of £25-30 billion. [The coalition, it seems, remains bent on austerity. Increased taxation, presumably, must not be announced until after the election].

Even the Speaker, John Bercow, was last night critical about what was seen by many MPs as the government's attempt to avoid a vote on the European arrest warrant. "I think I have given a fairly clear indication," he said, "that this has been a sorry saga. The House should not be put in this position. Most of us think a commitment made is a commitment that should be honoured, and we should try to operate according to sensible standards, rather than try to slip things through via some sort of artifice." [Strong stuff. Whatever next?]

A Better Care Fund plan, due to be introduced next April, is designed to reduce demand for A&E services and the number of hospital admissions, particular of older people. It seeks to keep frail people healthier in their own homes and is seen as vital to keeping the NHS sustainable. But the National Audit Office is sceptical about its planning and financial impact.

**12 November:** At last, payday lenders will have their interest, fees, total loan cost and default charges capped.

Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, reports a 60% rise in violence and 11 'mini-riots' at Elmley prison on the Isle of Sheppey. [Indicative of a wider problem in which staff shortages and a growing prison population combine to produce intolerable conditions.]

Denis Campbell reports the curious anomaly that the borough that hosted the 2012 Olympic Games – Newham – also has England's highest number of physically inactive residents.

Norman Lamb, Minister of State for Care and Support [who was a critic of the coalition's NHS reforms] has said that the NHS urgently needs an extra £1.5 billion, to be followed by an additional £1 billion in each year of the next parliament. This follows the statement by the NHS's Chief Executive, Simon Stevens, that £8 billion is needed to safeguard the future of the service.

Zara Aziz, a GP, contributes a thoughtful article on the realities of diagnosing and then supporting people with dementia. Among sagacious comment based on practical experience, she observes that a diagnosis of mind dementia often provokes anxiety and depression.

Peter Hetherington discusses the "real world in which councils now operate: trying to maintain a semblance of service provision in a deepening financial crisis". [Where I live, the Council is asking people which services it should prioritise, with the implication that more of them will have to be withdrawn. Savage budget cuts have already been imposed, and there are more to come. It will be clear from even the fragments that I bring to notice that these relentless austerity measures are already coming home to roost, having a severe impact upon public services across the nation, yet failing effectively to balance the Treasury's books].

**14 November:** Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, urges that as far as possible, people should visit pharmacists rather than Accident and Emergency Departments. [Services are increasingly under pressure as demand exceeds supply.]

Alex Salmond is about to make his final conference speech as SNP leader. [But somehow I don't think that we have heard the last of him.]

Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that record numbers of households were evicted from rented homes in England and Wales over the third quarter of 2014. [This follows the imposition of the infamous 'bedroom tax'.

**15 November:** Colchester hospital becomes the latest NHS institution to be found wanting by the Care Quality Commission as it struggles with "unprecedented demand".

Leadership of the Scottish National Party passes to Nicola Sturgeon. [I select this news because there is every indication of the SNP moving from strength to strength, and the potential for a transformational change in the UK's political order.]

Brain surgeon Henry Marsh's first book, *Do no harm*, has been shortlisted for a Guardian award. He is said to "write candidly" about his work, describing how he cuts into the brain and makes a small hole through which he pushes a fine sucker into the cerebral jelly: "The idea that my sucker is moving through thought itself, through emotion and reason, that memories, dreams and reflections should consist of jelly, is simply too strange to understand." [Irresistible!]

Sir Harold Evans, former editor of the *Sunday Times*, already pre-eminent for his campaign on behalf of thalidomide victims, returns to the case with an explosive two-page article revealing the discovery of

documents which “speak to” political intervention in 1969/70 to stop the trial of Chemi-Grünenthal, the company that created and marketed thalidomide, whose former chairman has since been honoured by Pope Francis I.

**17 November:** David Cameron says that “red warning lights are flashing on the dashboard of the global economy”, alongside fears that high debt, low growth and high unemployment may become the norm in Europe. TUC General Secretary, Frances O’Grady, reckons that “The same story of casualisation, part-time work and insecurity in the labour market is spreading across the world”.

**18 November:** H.M. Inspectorate of Constabulary has found an indefensible failure by police fully to record crimes. It has especially serious concern over the under-recording of rapes and other sexual offences.

The long-awaited acceptance of female bishops by the Church of England is welcomed by Giles Fraser.

The Care Quality Commission warns that one in six GP surgeries are at risk of providing poor care.

The Higher Education Committee reports that the reform of the funding arrangements for English universities has an uncertain future. Dr Ruth Thompson, co-chair of the inquiry, describes the present system as “the worst of both worlds”.

The Public Accounts Committee has criticised HMRC for being unacceptably slow in combating tax avoidance.

Polly Toynbee [and others] is sceptical about the Prime Minister’s motivation in warning of a second global financial crash.

Gary Copson, a former police commander, argues that Britain’s crime statistics are a political charade.

**19 November:** Allegations of corruption against Fifa rumble on. (Sport)

Colchester Hospital was placed in ‘special measures’ by the Care Quality Commission last November. Administrators have now admitted that there had been 563 serious incidents over a two-year period.

A controversial website, *My NHS*, part of NHS Choice, providing data on the outcomes for NHS surgeons, is announced.

George Monbiot calls into question the pursuit of economic growth.

Following a public debate hosted by The Guardian, Sue George asks fundamental questions about racism in increasingly diverse Britain.

**20 November:** The NHS Support Federation reveals that since the Health and Social Care Act came into force in April 2013 private companies have won two out of every three contracts to provide NHS services, some 131 out of 195, worth £2.6 billion. If this trend continues they look set to win more than £9 billion NHS deals.

The decision to ban Julien Blanc from entering Britain confirms that are limits to the right to free speech. [As there should be.]

Fines of over £50 million have been imposed on the Royal Bank of Scotland. These come on top of penalties of £400 million for failures that allowed foreign exchange markets to be rigged, and £14.5 million in respect of its sale of mortgage products. RBS was one of six banks fined a total of £2.6 billion for Libor manipulation.

Nicola Sturgeon’s election as Scotland’s first minister, alongside the acceptance of women bishops in the Church of England, marks a new high in opening the gate to greater opportunity for women. [The growing strength of the SNP north of the border, and UKIP in England, also marks a new dimension in British politics. Both Labour and Conservative camps will beware the strength of nationalist fervour.]

A ‘long read’ is devoted to the implications of Prince Charles penchant for ‘heartfelt interventions’ when he becomes king.

Seumas Milne observes that austerity has clearly failed (see *We Hate* no. 80). He notices that only one in 40 of new jobs are permanent, that most people’s living standards are still falling, and that the deficit and debt are growing. These failures are draining political support from the Conservatives, yet the government is continuing to encourage these pressures. Milne argues that David Cameron has an agenda beyond simply balancing the books.

**21 November:** Patrick Kingsley Agga reports that an Egyptian court has acquitted a doctor, who is also an Islamic preacher, of alleged female genital mutilation leading to the death of a 12-year-old girl, apparently accepting the doctor’s explanation. The verdict, for which no reason was given, cleared the accused of both mutilation and manslaughter. The girl’s father, who was said to have admitted bringing the child to the doctor’s clinic for the procedure was also absolved from any responsibility. A lawyer from the local rights group which brought the case commented: “Of course there will be no stopping any doctor after this. Any

doctor can do any FGM he wants now.”

**24 November:** The obituaries include one on Tony Lynes, which, in the context of my agenda, deserves a mention. The fact that we were born in the same year and the same month raised thoughts of my own mortality, as well as focusing my mind on the importance of a life well-lived [if only]. Tony, however, died not as a result of one of the infirmities of old age, but being hit by a car, which can happen at any age. As a political adviser, he influenced social security provisions aimed at reducing poverty and improving state pension provision. In a brief, but dynamic, time working for the Child Poverty Action Group he highlighted the importance of welfare rights, and stimulated the growth of the organisation. His subsequent work in the Department of Health and Social Security (1974/79), and then as an adviser to Labour’s shadow social security team, confirmed his reputation as a leading social policy academic. [He will be remembered, particularly here in Southwark, as a doughty and effective campaigner. Sadly his policies seem to have been put into reverse.]

According to research by Scope, although discrimination against disabled people has lessened over the last 20 years, a significant proportion of respondents say they still suffer indignities such as being stared at and name-calling.

Owen Jones concludes that grotesque inequality is still with us: “squalor is accompanied by unparalleled wealth”. “The world as it is currently constructed,” he says, “is living proof of just how selfish and greedy humans can be.” But this is not inevitable: “if we can build a society that encourages greed and sentiments which justify inequality, then we can also build a society nurturing solidarity, compassion and equality.”

**25 November:** A report by Birmingham Council has found that at least 132 children are suffering from or vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The perpetrators could be men or women and were not from a particular ethnic community.

**26 November:** Margaret Hodge, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and a scourge of inefficiency, has said that the DWP’s Universal Credit scheme is in a precarious position. She claimed that unacceptably poor management of the programme “has wasted time and taxpayers’ money”. A new untried digital service apparently intended to run alongside a live IT system (already in operation in 80 jobcentres) is said already to have been delayed by six months. The Guardian reports that Iain Duncan Smith, despite previous claims that the roll out was on time and within budget, has had to admit in Parliament that it will not be ready before 2020.

A report by Sir Stephen Bubb for NHS England recommends a set of positive actions to accelerate the transfer of learning disabled children from care homes into a supported community setting. In the year to September 2014, more were moved into institutional care (at a typical cost of £3,500 a week) than are being discharged. His ideas include a rights charter for people with learning disabilities and their families, including a right to challenge decisions to admit or keep people as inpatients.

**27 November:** The number of children in care has risen to its highest level in 25 years.

**28 November:** Despite a remarkably mild autumn, A&E departments are under increasing pressure. Last week saw the highest number of patients ever admitted for treatment in England: 108,301. Also the largest number having to wait more than four hours for treatment: 30,102 - nearly double the figure for the same week in 2013. One hospital chief spells out why:

- more elderly patients
- patients who, though younger, have breathing conditions, chest pains, heart problems, illnesses linked to their diet, such as obesity, diabetes and vascular disease, along with problems caused by excessive drinking and malnutrition.

A senior NHS figure is quoted as saying: “If I was Jeremy Hunt or David Cameron I’d be very worried that a full-blown, old-fashioned winter crisis is a real risk.”

**29 November:** 13 Somali men have been convicted of the systematic sexual abuse of vulnerable girls in Bristol.

Recent official figures show that record numbers of hospital beds are being taken up by patients fit to leave but unable to do so because social care support is not in place. Cuts to local authority budgets are said to be leading to tightened eligibility for care at home.

Louise Tickle reports that changes to eligibility for legal aid mean that increasing numbers of victims of domestic violence cannot get protection from our courts.

## WE HATE NO.82: SEXUAL ABUSE

*“Together, we can expose what has gone wrong in the past. We can prevent it going wrong in the future. We can make sure that people who thought they were beyond the reach of the law face justice. Let us come together to make this process work and finally deliver justice for what you – and too many others – have suffered.”*

Theresa May, Home Secretary, House of Commons, 3 November 2014.

*“One in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner, while 7% will be assaulted at some point in their lives by a non-partner, say the authors of a new series of papers in the Lancet. They conclude that too little is being done to counter violence against women, which is endemic around the globe.*

*Even though the issue is attracting more attention, violence – including intimate-partner violence, rape, FGM, trafficking and forced marriages – remains unacceptably high. Between 100 million and 140 million girls and women have suffered FGM, with more than 3 million girls at risk every year in Africa alone. Some 70 million girls have been married before their 18th birthday, many against their will.*

*The papers call for governments to take action on the underlying causes. Blaming the perpetrators because of personality or mental health disorders, or their own history of sexual or alcohol abuse, is inadequate, say the researchers. Economic, social and political factors also play a part and governments should address them.*

Sarah Boseley, *The Guardian*, 21 November 2014

I am thinking here of the predominant abusers: men. Who have what religious folk would call a God-given primordial sexual urge, but which I would call natural, which when given expression can be either welcome or abhorrent to those on whom it is bestowed. It afflicts all classes, though mostly kept under control. Those who pronounce on moral questions are clear that love and copulation between willing partners is acceptable, even life-enhancing, and in the context of conjugal partnerships ordained and fulfilling. In the prelude to such loving relationships ‘grooming’ is deemed agreeable, though we call it courtship.

But, of course, the urge finds outlets in less salubrious circumstances. Foremost in this unedifying story is sexual abuse in a family setting. This month, it really is *We Hate*, in that I significantly rely on the thoughts of my late partner, Ann Darnbrough. I don’t think I can improve on her words from our *Sex Directory*, published in 1988:

*“Many people are reluctant to acknowledge the darker side of sex. They would prefer to deny its very existence. And yet unless we are prepared to bring out into the open those sexual activities which, far from being joyful, seriously damage people; those who are caught up in them will go on suffering in silence and being seriously psychologically and emotionally damaged as a result. The question of rape is thankfully being discussed more widely now, though there needs to be a significant change in attitudes by those in a position of authority if the woman’s perception of this personal violation is to be understood. Child sexual abuse, on the other hand, is still very much a taboo subject, despite recent studies pointing to the fact that it is much more widespread than had been previously thought.*

*“For those brought up in sexually abusing families or suffering a marriage in which sex and violence seem inextricably and inexplicably interwoven, sexual activity can only be equated with fear and with personal humiliation. The innocent pleasures of awakening sexuality in children who trust and love their parents, and the joys of sexual loving that many adult couples share, are worlds away for people whose homes are devastated by sexual abuse and violence.*

*“We are talking about the betrayal of a child’s normal expectations of trust and safety from the adults around her, when vulnerability is exploited rather than protected. As those who have suffered know, and as statistics clearly show, the sexual abuser is more than likely to be known to the victim – the enemy within. Child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly a family crime, predominantly carried out by fathers against daughters. It rests firmly on a base, generally sustained by society at large, of patriarchal authority and power, but power to abuse, which can be sustained as though by right. Small wonder that many women come to see themselves as survivors in adulthood, rather than victims. The whole subject is surrounded by myth, mostly tending to stereotype familial roles and to shift responsibility towards those abused.*

*“The subject of rape has been similarly treated for many years, but is at last being discussed more openly. Women are making known their feelings on this horrific offence. They are refusing to accept the simultaneous roles of ‘victim’ and ‘guilty enticer’, thrust upon them by an ambivalent society. They*



are questioning the male-orientated values which perpetuate the idea that females of any age exist for the pleasure of the male, at his direction and command. Women are making known to male authority figures – the police, the judiciary, the legal profession and others – that they are not prepared to accept responsibility and blame for what is a male crime.

“For a society to remain healthy it is essential that sexual abuses, of whatever kind, should be widely understood and that services should be provided to help both victims and perpetrators. Society has for too long preferred to brush the subject of domestic violence, especially sexual violence, under the carpet. Incest, in particular, is more often than not a well-kept secret. Victims commonly keep quiet for fear of being disbelieved or blamed or because they sense that they would be striking at the roots of the cherished ideals of family order. Society seems, on the whole, to prefer the secret to be kept, finding it a subject of profound distaste which it would rather avoid. Even social workers are largely silent, uncertain perhaps as to how they can cope with the consequences of exposure. It is this guilty conspiracy of silence, this tolerance of ‘sex behind closed doors’ which allows these abuses to continue unchecked, very often for years on end. The family itself sadly tends to be bound even more closely within the shackles of its guilty secret.

“Opening up the whole area of sexual abuse for general discussion can only lead to greater understanding. Until this happens to a greater extent than at present, services to help families in distress will continue to be woefully inadequate.”

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It has taken a long time for society at large to wake up to the scale of sexual abuse, and the extent to which for years it has gone unchecked. Only recently have the proclivities of some of our celebrities and the emergence of predatory gangs up and down the country come to light. The reluctance of victims of rape to speak out has continued: fuelled by a dreadful fear of the intimidating legal process they are likely to face. The prospect of being cross-examined in court compounds the trauma of the abuse. In the case of Asian girls there is an added fear that their families will be stigmatised. In Muslim communities, rather than castigating the men who commit these crimes there is a common preference to blame the victims, and for those abused to shrink from the perceived dishonour of their misfortune. It makes me wonder if rape should be reclassified as an offence of strict liability: if the defence of provocation and enticement should be ruled inadmissible. So that men should know the consequences of failing to accept that no means no, and understand that the passion of sexual congress has to be mutually desired.

Gang abuse, such as that exposed in Rotherham and Rochdale, is particularly horrific. I do not need to go into detail, save to notice that grooming was there deployed cynically: the prelude not to a loving relationship but to the gross exploitation of young, vulnerable children, mainly girls, mostly those living in care or with dysfunctional families. And this has gone on, largely ignored, for at least 20 years. In 2012, a study by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England revealed that every year thousands of children were being raped and exploited, by gang members influenced by violent pornography. As many as 16,500 children were identified as being at high risk of abuse, displaying three or more warning signs, including running away from home, drug or alcohol misuse and criminality. Local authorities, children’s services, police and health professionals were said to be ignoring such warning signs in at-risk teenagers, often seeing them as complicit in their own abuse. A police report on the abuse in Rotherham used terms such as ‘undesirables’, ‘deviant’ and ‘promiscuous’.

The OCCE report found no evidence that these gangs of predators belonged disproportionately to a particular ethnic group, but this was recently contradicted by Nazir Afzal, the Crown Prosecution Service’s lead on child sexual abuse. Writing in *The Guardian* (1 November 2014), he argued that the Muslim community must accept that Asian and Pakistani men are disproportionately involved in “localised street grooming” of vulnerable girls, and that this was something that the community had to address. To this perspective is added the recent conviction of 13 men, all Somalis, found guilty of raping and forcing girls into prostitution in Bristol. Shaista Gohir, chair of Muslim Women’s Network UK, added that such offences partly stemmed from a lack of respect for women and girls. The Muslim community, said Afzal, needed to stop acting like immigrants and become part of British society.

Sexual abuse is nothing new, but the provocative opportunity to view explicit material certainly is. In working out the UK’s budget surcharge, the European Union reckoned that our sex trade accounted

for £5.3 billion of our income in a single year (2009), involving some 60,879 prostitutes. Pornography, according to the Children's Commissioner is "everywhere" (though statistics are unreliable) and is linked to "unrealistic attitudes about sex" and "less progressive gender role attitudes (e.g. male dominance and female submission)". My own reaction is that it also exposes one's own inadequacy. Nevertheless, the libidinous well of male sexuality is duly provoked and increasingly spills over into abuse and exploitation. So much so that it is to be the subject of a top-level inquiry, likely to last three years and controversial enough to prompt a squabble as to who might be sufficiently detached to serve as its chair. The problem with inquiries of this kind is that they tend to come up with so many recommendations that they are lost in the weight of their discourse. Whereas, we already know the basic systemic flaws: that abusers take advantage of young, impressionable, mostly poor, victims, let down by our social systems, and that police have come to regard those victims as co-operating in their own abuse, and are also fearful of being seen as racist. The priorities are for speaking out, facing up to the challenge and organising change.

Derek Kinrade