

## **Interview with a social worker on the subject of sexual violence in media**

Following the recent polemic on the first episode of the Goblin Slayer anime, we at the light novel podcast have wanted to engage in a more interesting discussion around the subject at hand which contains sensitive matters such as sexual violence. Being an all guys group, we thought it would be a good idea to have someone with more knowledge and a different point of view than us on the show, but scheduling and time zone being what it is, we settled for a written questionnaire instead that we could reference throughout the podcast.

The following questions were composed by the members of the light novel podcast and were answered by Brit, a social worker from New Zealand.

**Please be aware that the following questions and answers are from a limited group of person and thus do not constitute an absolute truth. We invite anyone who wants to know more on the subject to continue their research as this document only constitutes some basis in understanding this complex and sensitive subject. We still hope that this questionnaire will help broaden your knowledge on the subject.**

## Questionnaire on sexual violence

Q: There was a certain taboo regarding sexual violence in North America up to recently, the #metoo phenomena brought up the subject to daylight or at least it is my perception of it. Was there a similar change in mindset of the general populace and was there also an upsurge of sexual violence denunciation in New Zealand as well?

A: *The sexual violence taboo is not one specific to North America, but one that is international. The #metoo movement was an incredible way for people to quantify such impacts that sexual violence has. Again, the #meetoo movement was that of mass international social media level, which has made speaking out about such issues less daunting, as there is less stigma and fear, but less sense of 'alone', less 'victim-blaming' and more awareness of relative issues.*

Q: Do you think the general populace in your area have a good awareness of what sexual violence as a crime entails?

A: *I answer this question assuming that by 'area' you mean New Zealand, as working in the 'area' of social services, the awareness of such issues is part of the role. It is hard to answer such a question, as there can be some people/places/communities/etc that can be more aware than others, and vice versa.*

*Due to its hidden nature, it can be difficult to gather an accurate picture of the problem of sexual violence as it is often not reported, which means that statistics may fail to reflect the problem in full. There have been many research projects in New Zealand which show a high prevalence of sexual violence in our communities. (Rape Prevention Education, 2011)*

Q: Is there currently something that is done in your area in terms of education and awareness of the general populace?

A: *This is a tough question, as I think a lot of the raising awarenesses/education is influenced by internet/social media. I know of some absolutely phenomenal, hard-working agencies and people who are working tirelessly for education and awareness on such topics. However, I also acknowledge that such people and agencies are in a constant struggle for funding, and I wish that education/awareness was more valued and encouraged/shared by more people/agencies/etc.*

Q: What could be done to enhance the awareness of this problem that is sexual violence to your area's population?

A: *Media is the reality of the day and age we live in, so I think a massive step to enhancing awareness of sexual violence. Media reporting on issues of sexual violence is often under-informed and defends public myths and misconceptions about the dynamics of sexual violence. This misinformation affects society's shared understanding of and attitudes to sexual violence, promoting false narratives and rape-supportive attitudes in society. (Rape Prevention Education, 2011). I also think education and stigma breaking in schools and workplaces, which will also help in having a ripple effect in awareness/education societally.*

Q: Do you think that sexual violence in entertainment media in general is hindering the progress made in sensibilizing the population to the problem or can it have a positive effect?

A: *I think it is dependant on many things - the target age of the media, whether there is a content warning of some kind, and that there are contact details for support/information. I also think that it depends how it is portrayed in said media. Sexual violence is not a light topic, nor is it humourous or educational. This particular question is a topic of endless debate, based on many depending factors. Personally, I think if it is done with extremely clear content warnings prior to any content being shown, with support lines and links to information, AND it is done in a way that is respectful (\*obviously, this kind of topic cannot be easily done in a way that would be 'respectful' but by respectful I mean truthful to real experiences, without victim-blaming, stigmatising and so forth).*

Q: Do you think that banning such content in entertainment media will help to reduce sexual violence in society?

A: *Another arguable topic. Partially, yes I do believe banning non-consensual activity portrayed as 'enjoyable' or 'kink/turn-on. I also think that anything without warnings and support information should be banned. There is minimal positives to sexual violence in entertainment media, which is that is can raise awareness and start conversations. However, it can also cause more harm to those who may have experienced sexual violence, re-traumatising them to their situations and/or feeling misrepresented or disrespected by such media content.*

Q: Do you think that representation of sexual violence in media contribute to perpetuate some myths contrary to what really happens in reality?

A: *Yes, as mentioned in a previous question, I think media continues to enforce stigma and myths. Media reporting on issues of sexual violence is often under-informed and defends public myths and misconceptions about the dynamics of sexual violence. This misinformation affects society's shared understanding of and attitudes to sexual violence, promoting false narratives and rape-supportive attitudes in society. (Rape Prevention Education, 2011).*

Q: At the light of reading comments on the case that befalls us at the moment, some reactions to a certain graphic scene from a certain Japanese animation stated that depiction of sexual violence in entertainment media can make people become sexual aggressors. Do you think that to be a legit statement or if the cause of this deviance is due more to other causes like mental illness and the like?

A: *Although I do not think the intent of this question was to insinuate as such - I want to start by first reinforcing that mental illness does not abruptly cause sexual aggression (and vice versa) and that they can be independent from each other. Although I can see where this misconception can come from, media (especially entertainment) does often suggest those who are sexually aggressive have struggles with mental health (and this can sometimes be part of the situation). Referring back to the question at hand, I believe that media is a powerful tool, but so is morality, self-respect, boundaries and so much more. I believe that dipiction of sexual violence in entertainment media may encourage or reinforce people to act on sexually aggressive considerations they had prior to seeing such media, but I have not seen or heard of situations where it is the sole cause of such. So, simply, I disagree with both options put forth.*

Q: Often (specifically in Japanese media and pornography), sexual violence is represented in a more comedic way that most people will just laugh over and forget once it's gone, but sometime it is represented in a very realistic way that shocks people and make them feel unpleasant. Is there a form of representation of sexual violence that gives a bad effect on the awareness of the population to this social problem more than the other?

A: *As I have previously mentioned, sexual violence is in no way comedic, whether it is believed/perceived as 'realistic or not. This question may be more accurately worded as 'is there a form of representation of sexual violence that give a worse effect', which would be yes - portraying such topics as 'masculine', comedic, invalidating (as in unrealistic), and in any way that actively or inactively enforces stigma/myths/victim-blaming etc.*

Q: In terms of social interactions, how does sexual violence affect a victim in their development as a person?

A: *Development is a broad topic, as is sexual violence. Both, however, are highly influenced by countless variables. For this reason, there are many answers to this question. For some, physical contact can be triggering, for others this is not as much a concern. Trust can be hard, and some are able to continue to trust as they were prior to their experience. Often, if you know someone who may have been through sexual violence of some kind, it is best to simply ask them what it is that they prefer. For example, asking if someone would like a hug, rather than assuming and going for a hug. Not a particularly 'helpful' answer, but each person, each experience, each affect/s - it is all circumstantial and independent.*

Q: Are there any particular mental scars that victim of such act have difficulty to heal from?

A: *Simply - ABSOLUTELY. Beyond the more commonly known (PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc), there are also difficult affects such as self-blame, guilt, stigma, and so much more.*

Q: How does victims of sexual violence see the depiction of such act in entertainment media?

A: *Again, this can vary drastically, and is dependent on how and why it is portrayed, and can also depend on what form of art/entertainment media and how explicitly the media depicts it. For example, poetry can often hint at topics without explicitly covering a topic, whereas in visual media such as animation, this is not the case. I believe if there is any potential of trigger\* that there needs to be a warning. I cannot speak for all people, but can share my own experiences and informed opinions, as a personal and professional, and the affects can vary widely, from empowerment when done respectfully through to panic attacks, triggering negative thoughts/behaviour/etc.*

*\*<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/triggering>*

Q: In your opinion, how could sexual violence be depicted in media to be respectful of everyone involved in such crime?

A: *Brilliant question, I think I have tried to answer this in many of the previous questions. In summary, content warnings, support information and in a respectful way, that can empower people who have experienced such crime.*

Q: In New Zealand, what is the ratio of male victims versus female victims of sexual violence?

A: *Again, I want to repeat that due to its hidden nature, it can be difficult to gather an accurate picture of the problem of sexual violence as it is often not reported, which means that statistics may fail to reflect the problem in full. There have been many research projects in New Zealand which show a high prevalence of sexual violence in our communities. (Rape Prevention Education, 2011). However, New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey, Ministry of Justice 2014 reports 24% of women, and 6% of men, will experience high-end sexual violence in their lifetime.*

Q: How much of a warning about graphical content do you believe needs to be on a piece of media? If you've seen the episode from Crunchyroll, do you believe the message displayed there is enough warning?

A: *For my own personal and professional reasons, I have chosen not to view the episode that this involves, so apologise that I am not able to answer the latter half of this question. I believe that a quality content/trigger warning should be in place and this should include the topics that will be covered in the episode, as well as support lines and links to information before AND after the episode. Some people who have experienced sexual violence, and other potentially traumatising events, can watch/read/etc media that covers such topics, and others may think they will be okay to watch/read/etc but by the end of it, may regret watching or feel triggered from watching such. I think it needs to be clear that the topic will arise, but also needs to be mentioned whether it will be mentioned or explicitly shown.*

Q: Japanese manga, light novels, American comics, TV Shows, and video games typically have content warnings on them. But general fiction books I believe usually don't, at least stateside. Do you think it's the more visual nature that we hold to a standard when it comes to that, and do you think that novel content should remain outside of the normal ratings boards type standards? How much content warning does a novel need in its promotional material?

A: *I think this is a brilliant point, general fiction books do not usually have such content warnings (or not that I have seen). Yes, visual nature can to some point be more likely to trigger, but I do not think that novel content should stand outside of such warnings. I do think that there should be warnings on all kinds of media. Frankly, we (all people) are merely trying to enjoy whatever form of media we choose to divulge in, and for that reason, I think that content outlines/warnings are a way of increasing media enjoyment over all platforms, so I think it is the best option, for optimal media enjoyment for all people.*

Q: Sometimes content warnings spoil plot developments. So sometimes creators will hide those twists behind a veil of tame advertisement. Viewers can feel duped or tricked when their media does this with something they find heinous. Do you think either approach is inappropriate?

A: *Following on from the previous answer regarding media enjoyment, content warnings/outlines should be seen as respectful additions for those who may otherwise not enjoy the particular media, or may be triggered it. I believe that if anyone feels it ruins the plot development, they need to take a step back from the media itself, and think about the bigger picture. In particular to this topic, think about how sexual violence can and does effect/affect people's enjoyment of media, people's overall happiness, people's health, and people's everyday lives. When watching such content, think about the victim, think about them as a family member, friend or loved one - content warnings and outlines are to protect people who may otherwise have not been protected, and have had experiences that may impact on their enjoyment of such media.*

Bit of a harsh ending to that last question, but thank you for asking for my input on this. Actually, thank you for asking for input of any kind on this kind of topic - these kinds of topics can be hard to discuss, so I think this is super important to cover, so good on you.

I'd also just like to mention that this is only my knowledge, experiences and point of view, and that there are countless more facts, pieces of education and awareness, opinions etc that may counter or disagree, and that I am not speaking for all people, but have answered to the best of my ability at this time.

Thank you - Brit :)