

Youth worker sex scandal

Published: 23:01 Thursday 30 January 2003

A YOUTH worker has made a false rape allegation to gag the Yorkshire Post after she and another member of staff were caught on a security camera drunkenly having sex in front of a group of teenagers in their care.

The woman's spurious allegation, which guarantees her lifelong anonymity under laws meant to protect innocent victims of sex assaults, was made hours before details of the workers' antics during a visit to a Yorkshire tourist attraction were due to be published – but six weeks after the incident happened.

As well as suppressing reporting of a deeply embarrassing episode which questioned the standards of care provided by their employer, the move also forced an already hard-pressed police force to carry out an investigation which inevitably found there was no evidence to substantiate the claim.

Under law, anyone who makes an allegation of rape cannot be identified regardless of the circumstances of the accusation or the end result.

In this case, because of the close working relationship, neither of the couple's names can be published even though there is a clear public interest in exposing the activities of two people whose work involves responsibility for children.

The woman initially made contact with her solicitor at the suggestion of her mother who said she should complain that the Yorkshire Post was harassing her after she was visited at her home to ask for a comment.

A couple of hours later, this suggestion had crystallised into an allegation of rape and the solicitors, who were publicly funded, went to court to gain an injunction stopping publication.

During the police investigation which followed, officers viewed a copy of the security video which showed the couple having sex while on an overnight stay as part of an educational visit to the Earth Centre, near Doncaster.

Despite the woman's belated accusation that she must have been drugged, the tape showed her clearly taking an active role.

The Earth Centre hosts regular residential stays for young people from all over the country. A number of the group, several of whom were aged under 16, witnessed the incident.

The police did not feel the substance of the allegation warranted interviewing the teenagers who saw what happened.

The workers' behaviour shocked management at the Earth Centre who sent a copy of the video to their employers immediately after the incident. Both were quickly suspended and the male youth worker resigned soon after.

Before being made aware that his sexual partner for the night was alleging rape, he told the Yorkshire Post he was "very regretful" about the incident.

The man, who also runs a charity for young people (which also cannot be named), denied the care of the young people he was meant to be supervising had been compromised and claimed he had been intending to resign before the incident took place.

Since then, he has had to attend a police interview to be questioned about the alleged "rape". The validity of the claim was such that he did not bother to hire the services of a solicitor.

But emotions are still raw from the fallout of the incident and last night he said: "My wife has stood by me through this but the family is hanging together by a thread."

His wife added: "She's done more than use the law, she's ruined our lives. I don't feel anything about her – I haven't got any feelings towards any of the parties involved."

The incident followed an evening's heavy drinking at a bar at the Earth Centre. During the early hours, security staff saw the couple on the CCTV system having sex in a dormitory corridor. When they went to remonstrate, they found some of the teenagers watching. But when asked to stop, the couple simply moved to a toilet area and noisily continued.

When the Yorkshire Post began investigating the incident, the names of the couple were traced and both were given a chance to comment.

The man, who had already resigned, spoke briefly on his doorstep but the woman declined at three separate visits. On the third visit a note was passed through her door with a phone number and a message that the story would run the next day. Hours later, her solicitor became involved and an interim injunction was obtained.

In a witness statement used to secure the injunction, she claimed she had no recollection of what happened and that "the only possible explanation I can think of is that I was drugged".

Commenting on her first disciplinary hearing with her employer, she said: "They told me I have been seen on the CCTV footage, walking around naked and committing various sexual acts with..."

The statement added: "I could not believe what they were telling me, as I had no recollection of any of this happening."

Police initially told the Yorkshire Post the only allegation they had received was one of harassment but a couple of hours later they confirmed that an allegation of rape had been made.

They were duty bound to investigate but after viewing the video, interviewing the two participants and ascertaining there was no evidence of drinks being spiked they were advised by the Crown Prosecution Service that there was no case.

A date-rape drug would have rendered the victim relatively lifeless.

The Yorkshire Post has since received legal advice that it would be extremely difficult to challenge the anonymity of those involved because of the blanket legal protection provided to anyone making a rape allegation.

Media law specialist Robin Thompson said: "It's a tragedy that laws made quite sensibly to prevent further trauma for women who've been raped or indecently assaulted can be used by people who want to hide from the public glare and not be honest enough to admit what they've done."

There are also concerns that the two youth workers will be free to gain employment in the same field.

One experienced education professional said: "It makes me really angry because this undermines the position of vulnerable women who've had to fight long and hard to ensure rape is taken seriously. This woman is now using the law for her own selfish purpose.

"It also means it's feasible that either of these people could well be employed looking after young people again because there's very little to stop them."

A spokeswoman for the couple's employers confirmed the man had resigned but added: "It would be inappropriate at this stage to comment further as disciplinary proceedings are still ongoing with the other member of staff."

Suzy Brain England, chief executive of the Earth Centre, said she was shocked by what had happened but added the venue was a safe and secure environment for young people to stay at.

"The protection of young people is of paramount importance to us and the matter was dealt with swiftly and efficiently."

Solicitors representing the woman declined to comment.

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/youth-worker-sex-scandal-1-2448463>