

Paying price for false cry of rape

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It was a secret New Year's Eve sex tryst - but once she'd left her internet lover's bed, reality suddenly dawned for mother of four Nicola Jane Collict.

She had been missing all night - how was she going to explain it to her partner when she got back to their Dunscroft home?

To make matters worse, he had already reported her missing to police. So instead of facing the music, the woman lied to cover her tracks.

Selfishly and thoughtlessly, she concocted a terrible story, claiming she had been abducted, raped and dumped the next day on Doncaster Racecourse. Her fake tears succeeded in getting her partner's sympathy - and that of the police when she went to strengthen her story by reporting her ordeal.

But eventually, police discovered the truth - from her mobile phone. They found her with her unsuspecting lover at an address in Sheffield.

He had met her in an internet chatroom - and thought she was single. He had no idea that she had concocted a massive lie to cover up their night of New Year passion - a lie that could have landed him in prison for years. Collict was jailed on Monday by Doncaster Magistrate's Court for wasting police time.

She lied to protect herself and her attacker was a figment of her imagination. But what if police had come up with a suspect? Would she have gone along with things even further, and put a totally innocent man in the dock?

Some women do - it is likely there are innocent men languishing in jail or living out their lives in the shadow of the sexual offences register because a woman chose to lie.

But there are other innocent victims, too. Not only did Nicola Collict's stupidity result in a massive waste of police time and money; it did a massive dis-service to the real victims of rape.

Many female victims never report their attack. They are either afraid of retribution, or fear they will simply not be believed by police and the courts - and so the rapist remains free to ruin more women's lives.

"We know there is a vast difference between the number of rapes committed and the number of rapes reported to us," says Det Insp Pete Horner, of South Yorkshire Police's sex offences and child abuse unit. "Some women find it impossible to come to us because they know it's going to boil down to their word against someone else's. And women like Nicola Collict who falsely claim rape could well make it so much harder for them."

The county's sex offences team often come across false claims of rape. But DI Horner says women who take it as far as Nicola Collict did are few and far between.

"They usually realise how stupid they have been and come back the next day to tell us they made a mistake."

Police do not normally come down hard on such women. Few are prosecuted for wasting police time. "Although what they have done is wrong, you can understand why they did it. It's panic and fear," he says. "They've got themselves into a situation; they've made a mistake and instead of facing the music, they lie to get out of it."

"That means they are dropping someone else in it - and usually they swiftly realise that. In my view, though, women who feel the need to take things so far are still victims of something."

DI Horner strives to instil the same level of understanding in his team. It is vital that they view every reported rape as genuine.

"Regardless of how bizarre the victim's story sounds, we must and do accept it and believe it. It is really important to stress that."

"But my officers are human beings and while I would hope that they wouldn't let a false rape claim make them cynical of the next one they have to investigate, it could happen."

"However, I would rather we spend a couple of days investigating a claim that turns out to be false than miss a genuine one because of cynicism."

A small number of false claims the Sheffield-based team have investigated have little to do with panic, though. Premeditated cases have involved both revenge and money.

"We've had cases of vindictive women wanting making accusations deliberately to hurt a former partner or prevent them from having access to their children. And sometimes they are purely about financial gain," says DI Horner.

Famously, Christine and Neil Hamilton became innocent victims when a woman accused them of rape and sexual assault in a bid to extort money from them and the media. The Hamiltons lived through a nightmare of questioning, accusations and very public humiliation before finally being told they would not be charged. It was the supposed victim, Nadine Sloane, who was eventually jailed.

In South Yorkshire, it's far less showbiz.

"We have investigated women who have falsely claimed rape purely so they can win damages from the Criminal Injuries Board. It pays out substantial sums to victims but it can be misused by the unscrupulous."

Perhaps no one will ever know whether the most famous rape claim in recent years was true or false - because Ulrika Jonsson chose to claim she had been raped by a television presenter only in her autobiography, *Honest*. She refused to name her attacker to police or to press charges.

Even when fellow TV presenter John Leslie was named in the witch-hunt that followed, she kept her silence.

But it is certainly true that, if Ulrika had gone to the police, named her alleged attacker and a court case had ensued, she could have done a great deal to undo the damage done by women like Nicola Collicot.

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/whats-on/out-and-about/paying-price-for-false-cry-of-rape-1-316913>