



Northern CASA Submission to VLRC inquiry into improving the response of the justice system to sexual offending

The staff of Northern CASA thanks the VLRC for undertaking this inquiry. Our experience in working to support our clients as they engage with the justice system tells us that this inquiry is very much needed - that it is a system which contains many flaws that contribute to the re-traumatisation of the very victims that it seeks to assist.

We note that the VLRC has created many options for participating in this inquiry including the online form for people who have personal experience of being sexually assaulted. We have encouraged our clients to use this form to share their experiences of the justice and are aware that a number of them have used this opportunity.

However, we believe that the compartmentalising of victim/survivors' experiences into the question/answer format of the online form in some ways reduces the power of their narratives. For this reason, we invited our clients to share their stories of their engagement with the justice system and five female clients have generously done so. Their stories – as written by these women themselves - clearly highlight the inadequacy of the current system and the need for reform.

In addition, two of our staff have shared their reflections on the impacts on them of supporting people to navigate the justice system

We hope these Stories contribute to the VLRC's understanding of the failings inherent in our current justice system as well as providing suggestions for reforms that would enhance its potential to truly be a 'justice system'.

We thank you again for asking the important question about how to improve the response of the justice system to sexual offending and for listening to the voices of our clients.

Northern CASA is also a member of Sexual Assault Services Victoria and has contributed to, and fully supports, the SAS Vic submission.

Heather Clarke, Manager, Northern Centre against Sexual Assault
on behalf of Northern CASA staff and clients

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21st December, 2020

Client story 1 – Ani

I've heard people say that Law & Order: Special Victims Unit is a show that women enjoy because the show speaks to women's fantasies of perpetrators being held to account and brought to justice, something that sadly doesn't always happen for a multitude of reasons.

Although we are seeing some wonderful changes in societal attitudes towards crimes against women and their children, it doesn't take much for all of those changes to come crashing down when one judge makes a silly comment on the record or a detective questions a victim-survivor in a way that makes the victim-survivor aware that right now, that support they should be being offered is not available to them.

I have reported three perpetrators to police. Two who targeted women and one who targeted both women and children. My experiences have not been of perpetrators being held to account and sometimes sadly, as a victim-survivor I was being treated in a way that is not acceptable.

In the first instance, following my report the police were able to secure a conviction based on my statement and CCTV evidence. The perpetrator only received a small fine however and I know that's not the accountability I would like to see. Although sadly that was the only accountability any of these predators saw.

The second report I made to police involved a former boyfriend of mine who I had dated for a short time before discovering he wasn't what he appeared to be. After I broke up with him he began stalking me and later raped me. I reported to the emergency department the same day of the rape and was kept there for 16 hours, until the early hours of the morning. In that time, I received some medical treatment, but mostly spent my time waiting around for police and police forensics people to bother themselves with showing up. The police forensics person kept referring to the rape as 'sex' which I found incredibly offensive at the time, and still do. A week later after my case was passed around the relevant SOCIT. I eventually got a detective who made me travel to her then degraded me, even making a point of telling me I "shouldn't date such violent men" before telling me she wouldn't allow me to use the police's device to record a phone call with the rapist, which was something we had already agreed upon. After I gave her the statement, she made comments to other officers about how 'the victim' (emphasis on the word victim) wanted to use the toilet. The other officers looked almost as uncomfortable as I felt. I dropped the case after my only witness complained about the same detective 'strong arming' her. At the time the crime itself and the behaviour of police and the police forensic examiner made me feel hopeless and I didn't think I could cope or that there was any point continuing with the case when I didn't have police support. Although initially police had offered to help me get an intervention order, I was told at the time I gave the statement that they would not help me. I wound up having to deal with the perpetrators continued stalking and harassment on my own.

My final experience with police was when I reported a man who I knew to be a paedophile and rapist. I reported him for possession of child pornography and police used me as an information only witness after telling me I couldn't report anonymously, something I wanted to do for my own safety. At a later date, I had run into the offender socially and he seemed agitated and aggressive. After this interaction I wanted to know if anything had come of the investigation - assuming it had based on his behaviour - the police said their hands were tied

and they couldn't tell me anything due to privacy concerns. Apparently, the paedophile-rapists privacy is more important than my safety, despite my being a witness in the case.

Currently, there is a huge emphasis on victim-survivors coming forward and reporting these crimes. We're told that if we don't, we'll somehow be responsible if the offender chooses to re-offend. Although I know that should any of these offenders re-offend - and statistically it's likely they will - that it isn't my fault as they are the ones committing the crimes not me, it is still frustrating to see the same narrative of victim-survivors needing to come forward to save the day and keep everyone safe.

A large part of that frustration comes from the reality of what happens when we do come forward. When victim-survivors come forward we are putting ourselves in potentially dangerous situations, situations where we are degraded, situations we often have to spend just as much time recovering from as the assaults themselves. How can we be asked to do all of this to only see perpetrators not being held to account?

I have had some frustrating and challenging experiences with police, forensics, and courts when it comes to holding these perpetrators to account. It frustrates me as well that I have to give so much of my time and energy into things that should be so basic. I am writing this because I want to see changes, and I want to know that the world we are living in will be safer for women and children going forward. I want to know we are going to start holding these perpetrators who are threatening our communities to account.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. I am grateful for the opportunity to use my voice and hope that it can be part of a positive change so in the future others do not have to go through what I went through.

Client Story 2 – Kelly

My story is not just about an individual SOCIT informant doing a wholly inadequate job of investigating a crime. There are good police, magistrates, judges, etc. This is about so much more than the good or bad experiences of the individuals in this system. This is about a system that is totally broken in relation to sexual assault.

I entered a relationship that I could never have known was manipulated from the beginning. I was made to believe I was safe and I was loved.

The false sense of security that I was swimming in quickly drained, when what I can only describe as ownership came into play.

What followed was months of verbal degradation and physical threats, before the financial abuse began.

I remember sex becoming abusive, initially through fantasy: what he would say to me, the strangulation and showing me abusive pornography that illustrated his perversion. Pornography was used by him to normalise his demands.

I was made to believe I was consenting and participating in my own abuse/rape because he mostly suggested it; when he had been aggressive, he would reassure me, that it would help his stress. I was left to consider how my 'duty' could benefit the family as a whole. I could only say no inside my head.

He convinced me to stop working outside of the family and only for him, in his business. He had convinced me it was "financially smarter". This was the precipice for his covertly enforced control of my finances and the means to him creating my social isolation.

At first he encouraged a friendship I formed with someone he knew. One night, I went to her house and we talked until very late. When I returned home, he was waiting. I was ambushed. Verbally abused, physically attacked, then raped.

Now, I was saying "No" out loud!

What ensued, became this cycle of Jekyll & Hyde. He was the person abusing me and also providing relief from the abuse. He would tell people at work, when I was in earshot, what he had done for me, how good he was for me. Publicly, if I ever spoke up, I would appear ungrateful. I later found out, he had been engineering my character and its assassination the entire time.

He built in me, a fear of both him and his family, by telling me how he got away with everything. He told me of his family's firearms and criminal activity. The family's reputation was more important than the law.

I told no one; my silence was coerced through his abuse and control.

There was nothing my children and I could achieve, unless I risked everything, exposing him. The security my children thought they could rely on had to evaporate for me to ask for safety. So, I did my best, not to resign myself to the misery.

When I found out I was pregnant I was levelled.

The news of my pregnancy escalated his abuse and violence. It kicked off repulsive behaviour in him that was sudden; trivial arguing in front of the children wasn't hidden. He went to a movie with his mates for his birthday. The next morning he raped me, in what was the most painful and degrading experience he had made me endure.

The next 24 hrs expanded and contracted, sucking in every facet of my safety and livelihood. Within 48hrs I knew, I couldn't diffuse this again. Another painful rape, had brought a need to end this relationship.

I made an initial report of several assaults, including two violent rapes to SOCIT. These assaults were all committed by my partner at the time,

The police officer reassured me a crime had been committed. After they listened to me, it was reinstated that if I could help prove any of it, they would help me.

When I showed the police the abusive text messages, the apologies for raping me and the bargaining to not tell anyone, along with the broken windows and photos of his severed fists after a hospital visit, I believed this would be enough proof to receive help.

I was told the police may want to gather evidence from the crime scene, since DNA may be useful. Photos of property damage and a pretext call was discussed, as I was still communicating with my ex-partner and he was talking about 'coming clean' to his family. I was asked to send every detail I could think of regarding the violence or the assault to an inbox; that inbox was full.

When I called to query this or any of the issues we discussed, I received the run around. I asked SOCIT for assistance to get an Intervention Order against him. They said they could, but it would take some time. I was being threatened still and I was in the house where the abuse took place. So, I went to the Magistrates Court to get the order myself. As soon as they learned I was linked in with a SOCIT, they advised that I wait for them to do it. I was in fear for my children's and my own safety, as I suspected the offender would return to the house to assault me. His family members were also threatening me. I was extremely frustrated by this judicial response.

Fortunately, the counsellor I saw at CASA assisted me to self-apply and I was able to get an I.O. in place.

I tried on three occasions to arrange to make my full statement to SOCIT. I was calling and leaving message and getting mixed messages, with no one getting back to me. The detective who halted my attempts to apply for an Intervention order, had not only postponed that again, but was now on holiday.

I had to insist on my statement being taken by any officer available. I was finally allowed to submit my statement. It was a truly difficult task, but I was determined to report everything in detail in order, to give the police as much evidence as I could offer for their investigation. My sense of relief turned to shock, when after finishing the statement, I was spoken with sternly about perjury laws when making a formal statement. From memory, she used the term, "You had better be telling the truth about this as it is an offence not to tell the truth". I couldn't believe this officer appeared to mock the supposed 'victim focus' framework from which SOCIT had claimed to operate.

I left the police station thinking no one would believe me and that the police didn't care.

Months passed and I had very little contact from the informant. My CASA counsellor and I contacted the detective on one occasion when we had a session together. I sent several emails to the informant which largely went unanswered, and my counsellor also contacted the informant on more than one occasion to get information regarding the investigation.

My counsellor and I contacted the informant because I had learned that my friend, who was also someone I had named as a witness to some of the family violence, had not been asked to provide a statement by the police. In fact, none of the people I had told the police, could be considered as witnesses had been interviewed. It was shocking to be told by that one close friend I had, that my ex-partner now bragged about that.

When my counsellor called the detective to enquire about this further, she was told that there was not enough evidence that a crime had been committed and that "not everyone is arrested and brought in for questioning after a sexual assault allegation is made against them".

The question that keeps going through my head is "WHY NOT"? Isn't it a critical piece of the investigation? Shouldn't the alleged offender be expected to answer to the allegations in a formal setting, especially as SOCITs have the power to arrest them and bring them in for questioning.

The detective added, that my ex-partner was rung and "invited" to come in and make a statement but he declined. WHAT!? Sort of like being invited to a dinner party with an irritating guest and deciding you have a better offer. What if the crime he had been accused of was attempted murder, or theft of property? Would he be 'invited in' then? The informant also told my counsellor that among the texts they had retrieved from my phone, there was mention of drug-usage and how this may impact the matter going further. Even if I had used drugs, can I still expect justice if my body is violated by another person?

I was never queried about using a term like “drugs” to refer to a chronic neck pain issue.

I gradually came to realise that no-one was going to knock on his door and even ask him to answer to the accounts of rape I had reported. It felt like a total whitewash; my complaint was not treated seriously and I was totally disenfranchised. I lost all faith in the legal system and felt that the humiliation I had experienced at the hands of my ex was compounded by my experience with the police.

I was not asked to do a pretext call to my ex-partner by SOCIT, despite my belief that, in the initial stages anyway, there was a good chance that he would have admitted to the rapes. I was able to provide texts from my ex-partner to the police in which he apologized and virtually admitted to the sexual assaults.

The police operated like an underperforming triage for the court. There was no investigation. No gathering of information on crimes committed. I wasn't the only victim but they never asked a single witness.

I was dismissed.

My abuser wasn't even questioned. He wasn't even asked if he did it or not.

I would ask the VLRC to reflect on who the system is actually working for in sexual assault cases. Minor reforms to the current legal system will not fix the issues that lay at the heart of the problem. It is not enough to make it just a kinder, more accessible system for victims to navigate. Unless the outcomes are better, there will be no real changes for victims of sexual assault. The process will just make those involved in the justice system feel better and assuage some sense of unease about being part of a system that continues to protect the predominantly male sex-offenders. The truths about our legal system are uncomfortable truths but they need to be spoken about.

Client Story 3 – Danielle

- Reporting to police was a very traumatising experience, which I don't say lightly. And what happened after, completely shattered my world view and belief in our legal system, our country, and any ideas of liberty and justice I had.
- Reporting was a terrible experience and was in itself traumatising. I didn't get any support or the information I needed. I was dehumanised by the officer taking my statement and telling my story was extremely difficult. As the system stands, I would encourage other victims not to report at all.
- I reported the assault in 2018. The rape occurred in 2007,
- After making my statement at SOCIT I didn't hear anything about my case for about a month or two. I then contacted the woman who took my statement. She told me they were very busy with more "important" cases (which she also told me on the day of my statement and said that because of that I should expect a delay) and then blamed me for the hold up. She blamed me because after I gave my statement I was meant to go back into SOCIT again to try and get a recorded confession from my attacker for a second time, but when the date drew closer I realised I couldn't go through with it as I found the first time too distressing. She said because I was "unwilling" to do that things couldn't proceed and that she couldn't and wouldn't do anything until I did,
- During this time the woman who took my statement cced me on other police/ SOCIT office emails which was not only a breach of their privacy as I could read easily through the emails and get the contact information of officers working in that department, but a breach of my privacy too,
- After about five months of radio silence from the police I emailed the woman again to see whether the case was going ahead or not, but the email bounced back,
- After that I called SOCIT and I was told that the woman I gave my statement to no longer worked in that department, but no one contacted me or followed up until the end of 2019
- At the end of 2019 I was contacted by a man who was taking over the case. He apologised for the delay etc. and said there was enough evidence from my statement to go ahead with an arrest and that I needed to ok it
- I felt LUCKY that he took over my case because he seemed to be involved in the case and good at his job... but finding myself lucky in this situation is mind blowing to me and reflects how terrible things were/are,
- In 2020 my attacker was arrested in a different state,
- During the investigation 15 people were interviewed and said it was commonly known my attacker was a rapist and that he himself had admitted to raping me in the past,
- Because those 15 people couldn't remember EXACT dates the senior sergeant or prosecutor (I don't know) decided that their evidence would be dismissed as hearsay (exact dates of the party where the assault occurred could be found through face book event that can still be searched to this day, with an attendance list, and tagged and dated pictures of the invitees/ some of those 15 people, my attacker and myself),
- The senior sergeant/ prosecutor (again don't know) decided that despite the 15 people there wasn't enough to go to trial
- The man who took over my case and the person deciding these things have never met me or spoken to me in person, but despite not knowing me or what I am capable of or what I would like to do, they decided they didn't want to put me through a cross examination and took away my only opportunity to relieve the burden of my trauma and shift the responsibility onto the person who actually committed the crime,
- They took away my chance to fight for myself, my chance to be heard and my tiny hope to reclaim my life and start again. Now because these two people who have never met me decided this, I have to live with this burden for the rest of my life,

- When my case officer told me it wouldn't go to trial, he remarked that "even George Pell's sentence got overturned in the high court" and that "the legal system was slanted against victims", but I know that the George Pell's case went to trial with far less than fifteen people willing to speak up and with a much larger time lapse between the date of the assault and the trial. Also comparing my situation to a high profile case again dehumanised me and made me feel worthless and like what happened to me didn't matter
- He also told me that the department had sent the report of my case to my old address even though I had previously given him the details of my new address, and when told me that I gave him my new address for a second time over the phone, he said he'd send it right away. I still have not received my case report.

Reporting assault and getting the opportunity to go to court in this country is so flawed and problematic, and would be laughable if it didn't directly ruin people's lives. There is no system, no justice, no opportunity to even be heard- just a series of lucky or unlucky idiosyncratic events.

Client Story 4 – Tabitha

I was raped in July, 2017 in a toilet at an entertainment venue. I was quite drunk when I went to the toilet, (as many people could confirm), so clearly unable to give consent to any sexual activity. There was CCTV footage of the offender, who was a stranger to me, following me into the toilet. On the basis of these two things, SOCIT decided to charge the offender and we went to court. The court date was over 2 years after the assault, in 2019.

The trial was horrendous. It was as bad, if not worse than the actual assault.

The female defence lawyer was awful to me and this shocked me. As a woman, I anticipated that she may have some empathy for the fact that I was not just a witness, but the victim of the crime. I was aware that the techniques she used to cross-examine me tried to paint me as an attention-seeker and someone who was embarrassed about having had sex in the toilets, so later “cried rape”. She painted me as both a slut and a liar; although neither of those words were used, that was certainly her implication.

My evidence dragged out for 2 days. A 3rd day was touted but I could feel my whole system shutting down. I was answering a lot of questions with “I don’t know” responses as I was totally overwhelmed. I refused to attend on the 3rd day.

My mental health history was subpoenaed and used against me. I had disclosed a previous sexual assault to my psychologist for the first time just 2 days before the assault which was the subject of the trial. The defence lawyer kept questioning me about this as if it was no coincidence but rather, an attempt to get more attention/sympathy.

It felt like I was going through the assault all over again, but this time I was being mocked. I could conceptualise the offender’s behavior as shitty and deviant but I could not understand how 3 well-educated women, (the judge, prosecutor and defence lawyer), could allow me to be harangued in that way. There was no-one standing up for me and asking about the relevance of my mental health history. Surely, given the prevalence of mental health issues in our society, many people with these issues are assaulted. In fact, I have learned subsequently that pre-existing issues could even make one more susceptible to sexual assault as offenders tend to target the vulnerable.

The offender was not found guilty.

I had the worst nightmares every night for 2 weeks after the trial and still have them at least weekly almost 12 months later. I struggle to understand how other, less privileged people navigate the system. I am the “perfect victim” in some ways: I speak English, I am well-educated, white and middle-class.

I felt I was being attacked in every way. I understand that the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Why are there not protections in place for victims, so that we too are presumed innocent?

Why did the offender get to hear all about my personal health history, (he was a stranger to me), and yet he didn’t have to answer one single question to assist the jury to determine what had happened that night?

I felt like I was the criminal and I was the one on trial.

This system does not work for victims and it has to change.

Client Story 5 – Sarah

I met the perpetrator at a very vulnerable time in my life. I had no-one to turn to for support. There were red flags almost immediately but I was too alone to walk away. I got pregnant and became even harder to end the relationship.

I started counselling when my son was 8 months old. I had been sexually assaulted more than once. I was too frightened to leave the relationship. The perpetrator was a [REDACTED]. He threatened that if he couldn't have me no-one would. He also told me I wouldn't be believed, that I would be blamed, that I would lose custody of my child. The professionals I was working with tried to reassure me that I would be protected and that I would get the help and support I needed. I was told he would get a custodial sentence for the crimes he had committed against me. I reported to the police special investigation unit in 2016. They convinced me to make a statement. They promised witness protection and that there would be justice. They were kind to me and I believed them.

The process was long and full of stress and anxiety. I was moved interstate for a time and then came back to my home where 24 hour surveillance equipment had been installed. I was given a personal safety alarm. I eventually appeared at the committal hearing in 2017. It was horrible but I got through it and was proud of myself. The judge recommended the proceedings continue to a trial. It was only the beginning but it meant everything to me at the time. I felt believed and this was so important to my healing.

Not long after the committal I was contacted by the Office of Public Prosecutions OPP. They asked to meet with me. I was told there were concerns in relation to the trial and whether I would be believed by a jury. They spoke about the things that went against me. One was that I left the relationship and went back. The fact that they knew this was common to most relationships where there was intimate partner violence made no difference. The OPP told me it was unlikely that the perpetrator would be found guilty 'beyond reasonable doubt' so they would not be going to trial. I was devastated. I couldn't believe this could happen after all the reassurances I had been given. It was like living my worst nightmare. I tried to fight. I met with the OPP on 2 occasions with support from the police, the psychologist I was seeing at the time for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and my family violence support worker. I reminded them there were text messages where he admitted raping me. I told the OPP I was strong and that I would not let the Defence lawyers break me. I begged them. It felt like they humored me by meeting with me but they had already made their decision.

So I was left to deal with the whole mess. I felt betrayed by everyone, by all the reassurances that I was believed, that I would be safe, that the perpetrator would go to jail, that there would be justice. It was devastating. The perpetrator walked free, resigned from work to avoid any disciplinary proceedings and left with a package and entitlements worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was like he was rewarded for his crime. And me, I was back where I started from but everything felt a hundred times worse. I was distressed, broken and more alone than ever.

Reflections on supporting clients to navigate the legal system following a sexual assault

Sarah, NCASA Counsellor/Advocate

As sexual assault Counsellor/Advocates, our role is varied depending on the client's needs at the time. When a client reports the sexual assault to the police, there is inevitably a role for the Counsellor/Advocate to play. Reporting this crime is brave and it is most likely an unsettling journey for the client. SOCIT's responses to our clients are varied and I want to illustrate two comparative responses from SOCIT detectives and the profound impacts on our clients. I will start with the negative experience.

After being violently raped by her ex-partner, the Victim/Survivor reported the crime to the police. Experiencing trepidation about not wanting to get her ex-partner into trouble, she went ahead with the reporting because she wanted to put an end to the years of intimate partner violence she had suffered. From the beginning of this journey, the Victim/Survivor reported feeling invalidated by the police. In the preceding 6 months, the detectives have not once contacted the Victim/Survivor to provide her with an update on the investigation. The Victim/Survivor often felt hypervigilant about potential risk to her safety when the perpetrator was to be interviewed by detectives, thus prolonging her sense of fear and unsafety. A significant part of my role was validating my client's right to report and reassure her of the normality of long investigation times. I also supported her to manage her negative self-talk in relation to no contact from SOCIT – as time went on with no communication, she started to doubt the seriousness of the crimes she suffered and I supported her to trust herself and her responses to her trauma. I liaised with her SOCIT detective on her behalf and acted as a bridge between the Victim/Survivor and SOCIT, which was validating and reassuring for my client but she also described feeling disappointed by the process. This client suffered serious PTSD symptoms from the sexual assault and her symptoms were compounded by SOCIT's lack of communication with her. This was just one of the many ways in which I supported this particular client to work through her profound trauma.

I want to also highlight how our role can be impacted by SOCIT's positive response to our Victim/Survivor with an illustration of when the communication was excellent. A different client who accessed our service soon after the sexual assault, had a respectful and thorough response from her SOCIT detective. The detective either called or emailed her every 3-4 weeks with updates and check-ins about the progress of the investigation. The detective usually didn't have much to report, as we know legal investigations take a long time, however the communicating was reassuring, validating, empowering for this client, and it meant that she and I could more easily work through her trauma with less hesitation or self-doubt about reporting the crime.

Amber, NCASA Counsellor/Advocate

As a Counsellor/Advocate, responding regularly to Victims/Survivors who have very recently been sexually assaulted as well as providing longer term counselling, I feel the current criminal justice system utterly fails Victim/Survivors in almost every respect.

Last week I had a conversation with a Forensic Medical Officer after we had together just responded to a woman who had been raped. The Victim/survivor had experienced significant bruising. The FMO stated that this was the first case he had seen over the past 6 months where he felt there may be some possibility the case could make it to court due to the visible evidence of violence and force. He stated that of all the previous cases he had dealt with in the past 6 months, he was confident that none would ever make it to court as in the end it was the "issue of consent" that would be questioned and this would be so difficult to prove.

There was nothing about this conversation that was of a surprise to me. Having worked for Centres against Sexual Assault since 2013 my view of victims getting any of justice had become more hopeless with time.

I have seen many clients report their sexual assault with some sense there was a possibility they would have their day in court. I do forewarn my clients of the many difficulties in obtaining a successful conviction in sexual assault cases however I regularly have to hold back from saying "don't hold out any hope- your case has no hope."

I vividly recall the impact for one of my clients of hearing her case would not proceed further. She felt she had a strong case- her ex had- quite literally apologised to her by text for raping her. She was initially told by SOCIT she had a very strong case and this had kept her going. The day she received the call that the case would be dropped- "not enough evidence"- she was completely devastated. She felt re-traumatised, her PTS symptoms increased significantly and had to take yet further time off work to deal with this.

A summary of my notes 4 months later:

Since receiving a call nearly 4 months ago from SOCIT stating that the case would not go ahead (the client's) life has fallen apart. She has been generally unable to function as has been in a downward spiral of shame, and blame and even embarrassment that she could have ever hoped and trusted that she would ever get justice.

-is stunned that after admitting by text that he raped her, her ex could get off/the case was seen as "weak"

- feels like "he's been able to ruin her life and get no repercussions"
- feels she has gone back to denial
- been self-destructive and "done things I'm not proud of"
- anxiety has become at times debilitating
- feeling extremely low/no self-worth
- trying to work but often taking days off or not managing full days

I am currently working with a client who was similarly devastated to hear her case would be dropped. Here are some of my notes after she shared her news of this:

- received call from SOCIT that the investigation was now closed. SOCIT detective, stated that he had tried to advocate but the senior detective decided that, despite the fifteen witnesses, their evidence was "hearsay" and the witnesses couldn't all remember the actual date of the incident/prove they were present and this would not be strong enough to

guarantee conviction. He also explained that the police are less inclined to take such matters to court after the Pell case was overturned.

- (My client) was angered by this and raised issues such as her case was nothing like Pell's and that the night of the rape was documented on facebook and many of the witnesses tagged.

- (My client) also did not gain any comfort from attempts to convey there being some justice from the perpetrator being arrested, handcuffed and held in a cell for a time. She stated that that was not justice for her-- that he got to feel the sense of relief once he heard the case was dropped whilst (my client) feels she died the night he raped her.

As a counsellor I feel hopeless and helpless as a result of our adversarial system. It is a system that rarely delivers justice but frequently causes further damage and distress to victims.