

Hello,

Welcome to **Week 18 MSCOS**. Please check out this week's news, features and of course, our online pages and moderated [discussion forums](#), where you can post anonymously – we need YOUR perspectives on practice.

This week our feature is on the core outcome, [Safety from Any Trafficker or Other Abuser](#). We would like to thank **Sam***, the protagonist of the new film '**Catching my Rapist**' which is featured below and was screened at **Whirled Cinema, Brixton** in July. **Sam** reflects on the film for this MSCOS update, and outlines her key recommendations for improvements to the criminal justice system (below).

We would also like to thank **Ruth Aguele**, the Chair of our **MSCOS** online forums with survivor leaders on [Finding Purpose in Life and Self Actualisation](#). She describes our latest forum which will be featured in more detail in future updates.

THIS WEEK'S FEATURE

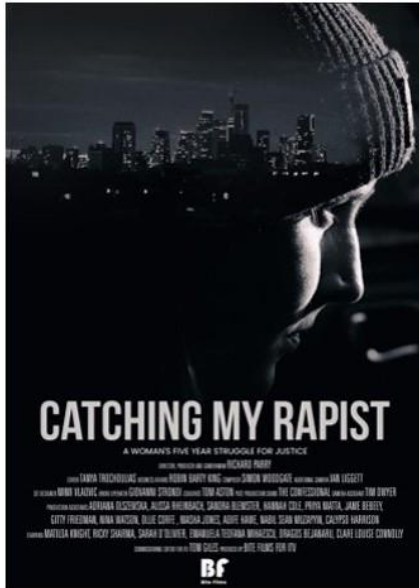


[Safety from any trafficker or other abuser](#)

“I wanted to take on the opportunity to make a film and capture my journey in hope that it would give other victims the confidence to come forward, because everyone deserves a fair opportunity to be heard and get justice. Survivors are often deterred and silenced by the failings of the criminal justice system, and it's important see success stories as well as to highlight injustices for what they are.”

A unique film was screened at **Whirled Cinema, Brixton** on 16th July 2023 for invited members of the anti-trafficking and relevant sectors. '**Catching my Rapist**' is an ITV film which documents a woman's five-year struggle to bring a multiple offender to justice in the UK criminal justice system. **Sam*** the film's protagonist is a formally recognised victim of trafficking who is the driving force behind this project, having pitched the film to Richard Parry, its director and producer, and making decisions on all aspects of the depiction of her journey.

We see footage of Sam's Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews and witness the clear and visible stress of a person being interviewed about serious crimes. As Sam becomes frustrated by the lack of progress in her case, the website advertising her 'services' as an 'escort' remains up and running on a mainstream website online. *'I decided to undertake my own investigation, including the bold move of booking a meeting with 'myself' via the website. I wanted to understand how the online 'escort' profile was being used. It was created by my perpetrator with my identity attached. I had never consented to it, I had reported it as a crime, and yet it remained available for 'booking'.*



Although the subject matter is grave, the film has light and humorous moments, carried by the unfailing spirit and courage of Sam, her partner and their little dog who together create a delightful home-made support network. We see the relationship evolving between Sam and the filmmaker over the course of their work together, and the film is visually compelling, with a moving, aerial view of London which challenges us to adopt a wider understanding.

Changing Practice:

Sam says:

“The first time I watched the film, I left the studio not remembering anything I had just watched. I guess it was difficult to process a 5-year journey which had been condensed into 71 minutes of footage, and it was a bit triggering to be taken back to a time where I was incredibly vulnerable, at my most raw, and helpless. It was the first time I had seen my video interviews with the police. It was amazing to see how far I had come, but hard to watch myself at a point of such fear and insecurity in the world around me.”

Sam has a detailed and in-depth knowledge of the criminal justice system, and a practical way of explaining it which could benefit many stakeholders across the UK system. Here are a few of her recommendations for needed improvements:

- **A line of clear, transparent, and timely communication across all the various authorities involved, particularly updating between Home Office and the police.** The conclusive decision that a person is a recognised victim of trafficking should be communicated to the police and should influence the police and CPS’ understanding of the case and charging decisions.
 - **Communications should be far more consistent between the police and the victim of crime, at minimum on a monthly basis.** It is shocking that victims can be left for months, even years without updates. During this time victims will drop away from involvement in prosecutions due to lack of support. Police need to know that **when there is no news, this should be provided as an update**, for example, *“hello, I just wanted to check in with you to see how you are and let you know, we have no current update, but we will keep you informed.”*
-

- **Informing the victim of the arrest of the perpetrator should happen before any other announcement is made, or, in cases where it is possible, before the arrest takes place.** The whole matter of arrest for a victim is highly significant: victims need to know that the police will make an arrest. It is not necessary to give them all the detail, but it is necessary to prepare them for this event mentally, to consider the availability of their support network and their emotional well-being. There can also be safety issues to consider. One thing that should never happen is the police briefing the press on an arrest made *before* informing the victim. It is terrible to discover in the press that your perpetrator has been arrested – I deserved to be their first priority in having this knowledge.
 - **It is vital to create police and press guidelines for the language that is used to describe victims of this specific crime.** The way we are depicted can be degrading and reductive, and it is a deterrent for other victims who may see this coverage and decide to remain silent. It leaves you feeling less worthy of information than the press, and powerless to control the narrative about you and your story. Police should pre-warn victims about statements to the press and also listen to how they describe themselves and what happened to them. Claims of '*rescue*' in the press by police and the authorities are often inaccurate: ***I saved myself. I came forward myself. It was not made easier for me.*** Overall, implied judgement of the actions of victims rather than perpetrators should be scrupulously avoided – this happens a lot, not only in the press, but also in courts: we have to recognise that it is the actions of rapists and perpetrators which should be judged and brought to justice.
 - **Handling and securing of evidence by police must be urgently improved. in my case, key evidence was lost and this happens in other cases also.** With regards to Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews, there are two copies, (1) a working copy which police can reference and (2) a master copy which is sealed and can only be opened before a Judge. There is no excuse for losing such important evidence. The first line of responsibility should lie with the detectives that conduct the interview, and there should be another body who signs for the security of evidence in the appropriate systems and has the overall duty of ensuring both copies are kept. Again, survivors drop off from supporting prosecutions where there has been mishandling of evidence. *It means having to be put through the process again and again* – it is re-traumatising, you feel as though you aren't being taken seriously, and lose confidence in working with the people whose role is to support you though the process.
-

- **The need for criminal justice systems to ensure continuous monitoring and shutting down the technological methods of trafficking is urgent.** *Both the website and the app which lured me and many others into entrapment by a perpetrator of rape are still operating online today.* It should be obvious that any website which advertises sexual encounters or 'escort services' should be monitored, as should any app which offers its audience 'a job within 24 hours'. Many survivors have photos, videos and 'details' about them posted by perpetrators without any form of permission to be used over and over again. It is a haunting experience which makes survivors feel isolated, humiliated, and too afraid to come forward. Many perpetrators are out there right now, utilising the offer of fake 'jobs' or other enticements to entrap and rape adults and children. *Whatever is being done about this – in the fields of AI or tech – is not clearly within the remit of police and we do not know enough about it.* In my case, my perpetrator's identity and illegal operation was shared widely across multiple platforms. He had built a public profile whereby people who had encountered him shared their concerns and warnings. If there had been a system flagging the repeated use of a person's name alongside keywords such as 'rape', perhaps his actions may have been noticed sooner.

See the film here: [Catching My Rapist \(Exposure\) - ITVX](#)

For more information: [CATCHING MY RAPIST INFO PAGE | BITE FILMS](#)



Finding purpose in life and self-actualisation

We are continuing our work on the MSCOS Core Outcome, [Finding Purpose in Life and Self Actualisation](#). On 25 July, the **MSCOS Community of Practice** held a forum in which **Survivor Leaders talked about art, music, film, theatre, social media and activities they enjoy**. They considered this from the viewpoint of their daily lives outside of lived experience and survivor leadership, as well as connections within it.

Ruth Aguele, MSCOS Research Advisory Board (RAB) member and Chair of the forums on [Finding Purpose in Life and Self Actualisation](#), says:

"The world tends to see us as survivors first, or people with 'lived experience' of trafficking. In the sector we work in as survivor leaders; who would have known that we have so many interests, skills and this artistic side to us, that only we know about? I think it is key to create this awareness and also to educate people that we have a side to us that has nothing to do with our stories. We are starting to learn about each other through MSCOS and realising that being a survivor is one part of our lives; on another side we

have a completely different life. There are similarities between them though because as we have found in our discussion,, we use both to connect with people, and to help others.”

Information on this forum will be provided in forthcoming MSCOS updates.

[DID YOU KNOW?](#)

If you've joined our mailing list recently, over the last 17 weeks we have covered a variety of outcomes, highlighting best practice models and frameworks. You can access them all in PDF [here](#).

Please forward MSCOS to any colleagues or network connections that you think may be interested in our work, and they can sign up to receive newsletter invites via our contact form [here](#), or by direct email to mscos@kcl.ac.uk.

The MSCOS Community of Practice content is hosted by the Helen Bamber Foundation. Content is designed and directed by Queenie Sit and Rachel Witkin.

