



**REAL STORIES OF WOMEN**

**VictimFocus**

**CHALLENGE | CHANGE | INFLUENCE**

**HONOURING THE VOICES OF  
WOMEN WHO BECOME  
PREGNANT OR HAVE CHILDREN  
CONCEIVED IN SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE**

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**JANUARY 2021**

This section is a collection of unedited stories and accounts from women who have become pregnant or had babies from sexual violence. This section is to honour the voices of all different women from different perspectives without editing, analysis or interpretation.

All women have been anonymised and any identifying data has been removed.

We would like to thank all the women who took part in interviews or answered anonymous questionnaires with Jessica in 2018-2019. Your experiences and honesty have helped us to create a set of services and reports that will help professionals, policymakers and the general public to understand how complex it is to become pregnant or have a baby conceived in sexual violence.

The research, analysis and studies are contained within other reports and can be found at [www.victimfocus.org.uk](http://www.victimfocus.org.uk)

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This document is published as part of a 3-part series

This document is part 2

**Part 1:** Public perceptions of women and girls who become pregnant from sexual violence

**Part 2:** Real stories of women: Honouring the voices of women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence

**Part 3:** Exploring the experiences of women who become pregnant or have children conceived in sexual violence

## Lorna

I do not know if my story would be a help. In my case, I was in a very violent relationship. Eventually, when I got help, the words "domestic violence" were used, and for simplicity I usually describe the relationship as such. But even the DV groups I found help in struggled with my story as it started not as a mutual relationship but as an imprisonment during which I experienced torture to the point he broke me and maintained a very thorough control over me.

When my daughter was conceived, I know exactly when. I had tried to flee and took an overdose of Benadryl partially thinking death would be my only escape. Once the disorientation kicked in from the meds, I called him to get me. I had not taken enough to hurt me, but enough to make me loopy and unaware. Two days later he bragged to me about how much he enjoyed sex with me and I had no recollection of it. I found out I was pregnant 3 weeks later. I cried and cried because I did not want this baby. I wanted away from him, not tied to him.

Long story shortened, I eventually found the ability to flee when she was 4. He was discovered to have been making child porn (sic) involving her and a neighbour's girl. I fought for 8 years in court to get her away from him. Believe it or not he was never jailed, and the court gave him supervised visitation, his mother supervising. She was suicidal by age 11. Hospitalized. I violated the court order then and refused to send her anymore. I faced trial for violating the court order. In the end I won her freedom.

I have struggled to parent her. When I see her dad in her I fight my internal fears and anger. Her therapist does not understand. I love her and yet she keeps him next to me. She knows her dad hurt me and her. She does not remember much even from visitation. She is not being pushed to remember. I cannot talk to her much about her dad. My therapist and her therapist consulted along with me and we all think I have too many strong feelings that might be too much for her to deal with.



## Maya

If you were raped, and you had a child as a result, and you now regret it, how can you say that? You can't say that. Under no circumstances is that ever supposed to be true, people can't handle that kind of a truth, but that is my truth, our truth.

As a young woman in an abusive relationship many years ago, I knew I didn't want the child I had conceived by rape within a relationship. I was living somewhere abortion is possible. I saw a Catholic doctor - who refused to sign off on the next step of the process and made me feel guilty about wanting a termination. I ended up not going through with it.

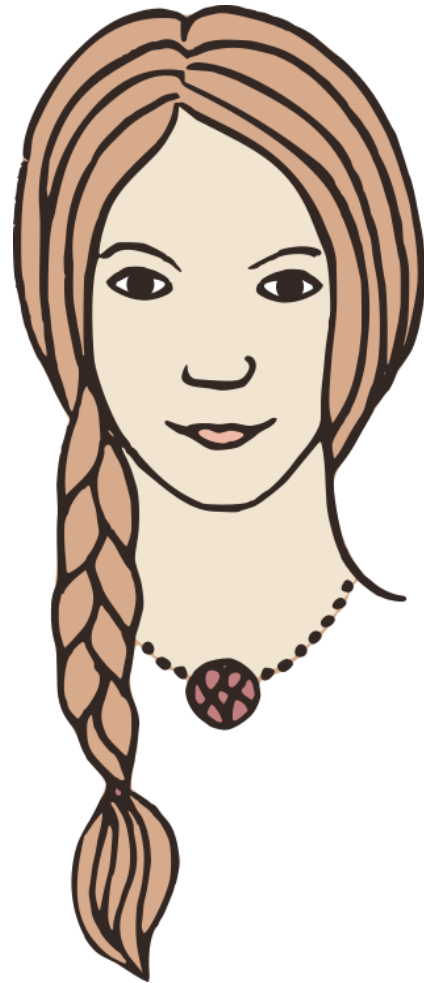
I decided instead to put that baby up for adoption. But as the birth drew clearer the social workers made clear that it was their official policy to give the child to the family, which meant that they would give the child to the father (the rapist). It didn't matter that he was abusive to me - because it was my word against his - so he would still get the baby. I couldn't give a baby to a violent man. I just wanted her taken to a new family, totally distant from anyone I knew, so she could grow up with no one bad in her life. But it became a choice between she grows up with parenting 100% from a rapist, or from me and a rapist.

I didn't want a baby. Let alone to be tied to a manipulative and frightening man by a baby that I would now have to devote my life to defending.

I kept my daughter, who is now a young adult. Even though she is a legal adult we have both had 18 years of misery and torment from this man, who well knows what I can and cannot prove, and is well aware that he doesn't have to prove he's perfect, just create enough doubt that I might possibly be wrong, in order to keep rights. He has been abusive to her on those stays but when I have brought it to the authorities, he cites that I accused him of abuse too, and I couldn't prove that either, so he says it's because he has done no wrong, and I am a fruitcake.

My daughter has grown up through 18 years of periodic misery as this devious, evil man, has used my daughter as a weapon to continue to control and harm me further - via her. Daughter has serious depression and self-harm issues and has had since she was 8 or 9 and struggles to be in the company of her peers. We live a long way away from where we come from now, and even with her an adult, the manipulation and cruelty is still making life hard, and frightening.

My whole life was taken over and ruined by the control that the rapist was able to keep over me, via a child I never wanted or asked for. I have other children, much younger, with a good father, who were planned, and that this a revelation, it's another world all together. We all love each other, and the little children love big sis, and big sis loves them, but we all feel the pain of how different her life is, to the carefree lives of the planned children.



In all honesty, if I could turn back time, I would not have had my rape-baby, and in all honesty, if she could choose, she would not have chosen to have lived like she did.

But you can't say that can you? You watch the hate pour in if you read this out. No one is ever allowed to say they regret a child. Automatically, if you regret your child, you are second only to Satan. But I am not that, I am a loving Mum who has watched a little girl live 18 years as a weapon to injure me with, to a father who never should have been one.

I have spent decades in poverty, never being able to settle down because of the rapist, who now had a continued claim on my life. It's a wonder my younger children ever did happen, given that I first had to find a man brave enough to dare love us, with a very clever, very sly wife-beater and rapist making life miserable for daughter and all these years in the background, popping up to toy with us, and going again just long enough that we might dare hope for peace, then popping up and doing it again, and so on. Having an abuser for a father is no life for the girl.

I've been to court at least a dozen times. I have spent so much time in social care interviews I might as well reserve a chair... And why? I knew from the beginning that this shouldn't happen. I knew from the outset, that carrying a child from rape would be a bad idea. Particularly rape in a manipulative relationship. But you can't say that. There is no place I could take a platform and say that. I'd be lucky not to be assaulted or have my car burned for saying that, but it's every bit as true as the other women who can take a platform and recount a different experience.

So when you give a platform to the others, try to remember, my side of the story also exists - but we're silenced.

## Rhonda

I have a 23-year-old son from date rape. I was attacked by the man on the first date when I was 17 years old. My son is now a father himself to a young baby, and his wife has just announced she is pregnant again.

I told my mum what really happened years ago, but she was very unsupportive and this led me deciding not to tell anyone else the truth. I have lied to my son about who his father is, and allowed him to believe it is a man I was married to when he was a child.

To this day, my son believes this man is his dad. My ex obviously knows I have done this and he knows that my son is not his, but this remains a secret. So we both kind of lie to him.

I'm now questioning what to do.

My son is getting older and is having children. I worry that he might develop health problems that are related to the rapist's side of the family or genetics, but when he goes to the doctors or hospital, he gives them the medical history of the man he thinks is his real father.



## Rachel

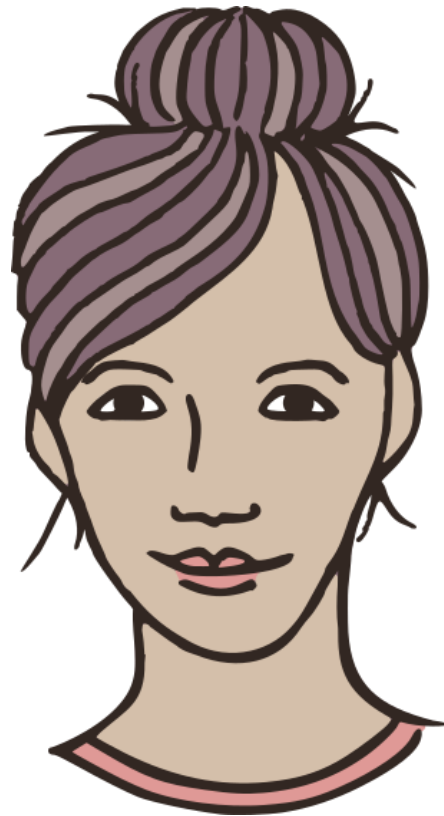
Every time I have been pregnant I have known before my period was due and, in an abusive relationship, I avoided taking the test until I felt the circumstances were safest. The first time I got pregnant I was a teenager. I don't think I had/acknowledged many thoughts or feelings of my own at the time because I was being so controlled. My abusive ex-partner informed me that he 'could not' have a baby and that he would leave me if I had 'it'. At this point in my life I was almost entirely dependent on him as I was a homeless teenager trying to escape abusive parents and had already been being abused by him for a while. I think I only had not gotten pregnant before because I was not yet fertile.

He took me to the drop in family planning clinic to get an abortion. I did not get to decide, he accompanied me to the three appointments relating to this process (the drop in, the dating scan and the abortion itself) and the only time I was alone with healthcare professionals was when I had the scan to determine how far along the pregnancy was. He was not allowed in the room only because it was a vaginal scan. I do remember hoping that someone would talk to me properly during this because it was the first time I had been away from him but they didn't, I don't think they even looked me in my face because I was crying.

I felt like everybody was disgusted with me and I was just a problem to be made to go away as quickly as possible, because everybody else knew better about what was good for me and did not hide their judgement. I did not consider the possibility that I had any agency over any of this and nobody told me that I did or even indicated this was the case. I did not feel I had any agency over contraception or sex either because in reality I did not, the first time I had sex with him he removed the condom without telling me and I only found out he had done this weeks later when I overheard him laughing about it with other people at a party. I had never had sex without a condom at that point, I feel like now I would have noticed the signs but then I had no clue.

The drop in clinic lectured me about not being on contraception (I was very naïve and didn't even know about hormonal contraception, not that they asked what I knew) and told me I 'had to have' STI testing if I was being referred for a termination. This implied to me that they thought if I was stupid enough to get pregnant I must be sleeping around. I didn't realise at the time, though I should have done, that my ex was sleeping around and had given me chlamydia (of course he blamed me for this in public) so it was good they did the tests but the attitude was appalling and has added to my ongoing anxiety about healthcare professionals. The whole experience felt totally humiliating, and replicated lots of my previous experiences of being willfully ignored, feeling like people were angry with me and swept under the carpet when I was being abused as a child and I had spoken out. It felt like I was screaming but no-one would hear, but this was my daily life at that point and had been for a long time.

Not one person in a professional role ever questioned what was going on.





In the dating scan appointment I asked to look at the screen because I had begun to comfort myself by humanising the pregnancy; giving it a sex (female) and a name (Alex) – I still find this a comfort. The people doing the scan refused to let me look at the screen because they told me it would upset me. When it was determined that I was past the cut off for a medical abortion I was booked in for a surgical one. I remember feeling very annoyed that I had had to suffer the indignity of a vaginal scan when I was far enough along they could have done an abdominal one. I'm not sure why I fixated on this particular aspect. I later found out that at this appointment two doctors I had never seen or spoken to signed the paperwork to authorise the abortion.

I had to get the bus to and from the abortion itself which took an hour each way, and my ex was obviously accompanying me. It all felt unreal until I was in the hospital bed. This is the only time I verbally expressed that I did not want to go through with it. I was crying and crying and just repeating 'I don't want to do it' and at one point a nurse on the ward looked concerned but my ex said to her 'is it alright if I just take her for a walk to talk?'. It felt like people were avoiding me. We walked in the hospital grounds and looked at the duck pond, I can't remember what he said, I remember when we came back the nurse brought the paperwork and through tears I cried 'but I don't want to!' as I actually signed the consent form. I felt like it was all over at that point, I just gave up and let things just happen to me from then on.

They gave me the pessary, later they gave me the anaesthetic and when I woke up they just told me they were going to give me a 'contraceptive injection' nobody explained any of this to me or gave me any choice... and then I was sent home on the bus. I just felt like everyone in the world was angry with me.

My ex got off the bus unexpectedly early promising to meet me in the evening, I didn't know at this point, he said he was going home for space, but he actually went to the pub to celebrate with his friends and never came back. I went to meet him in another pub but he didn't turn up, I remember desperately wandering through the town bleeding and in pain looking for him at 11.30pm until I found him dancing in a nightclub. I was still staying on someone's sofa so I didn't have anywhere private to go. He basically ignored me for a while after that. He ultimately did not let me go though.

It took 12 months for that one depo shot to wear off I think because 12 months later I was pregnant again. I was still homeless and he was not living with me. He did not force me into an abortion, this time he said he wanted the baby and we managed to get a flat. I don't remember feeling like I had any choice. He didn't like me going to antenatal appointments so I missed many of these. I was in labour for 7 days and eventually had to be given a drip to speed up labour, he got angry with the health care professionals at one point and threatened to punch them. He brought his whole family in to gawp at me in the labour ward too despite me not wanting them there then. No-one took any action over this either.

When my son was about 6 months old I found incontrovertible evidence he was sleeping around and I told him to go and stay with his mother but I invited him back temporarily so he didn't miss his son's first Christmas. When I refused to have sex with him he raped me and after that I just didn't make him leave.

After Christmas I knew I was pregnant again but I didn't want to take a test because I didn't know what he would make me do, so I just decided that I would deal with it at a later date. The day after I made my single claim for benefits I took a pregnancy test and it confirmed what I knew.

This period of my life was the happiest I have ever been. I was glad my son would have a sibling, I felt free, I felt strong, I felt like I had a huge amount of money because I had been so used to paying half



the bills and all the food/clothes on just the tax credits. However, I don't think I really 'decided' anything about this pregnancy either. I was just surviving a life that I didn't feel like I had any control over or agency in.

When you live under someone else's control and you are used to nobody outside the situation helping or even being kind, then you manage that by just coping with things that feel like they are 'just happening'.

I try to use my experiences to help other people. I've talked to a lot of women through mumsnet and I feel like I have helped a few of them. I am not ashamed anymore but I take care not to speak to family (as they are abusive) and I have not told the children the direct truth, as they have contact with their father. When they are older (they are 12 and 13) I may expand what I have told them about mine and their father's relationship but I have not decided on this yet as adolescence is a bad time full of self doubt and self esteem problems. It depends whether I feel, at any time, that it will benefit them to know. My daughter is autistic so I will take this into account. Interestingly she has repeatedly asked me if she was conceived by rape in the last year or so. I am not sure how to answer this at the moment.

After he left I started going to a baby group at the local children's centre, this had not been allowed before. The workers there immediately recognised that I had been abused and made a referral to women's aid. It was pretty difficult for me to recognise at the time that he had been abusive because I had lived in this way all my life. I still felt dissociated and like I didn't belong there. When I was a child I developed a coping strategy of trying hard to comply whilst retreating into my own head. I used to always think 'you can never have what is in my head'.

I wish I had been able to make more of the support I had then because I have never had such good support again. I minimized most things. I think they saw through it mostly, I just felt like I was a fraud and that I shouldn't be there. They were very supportive when he brought a vexatious court case though and at one point I decided that I should just do whatever it was that they told me to do because so much of what they were saying made sense. I swapped the control of the abuser for the control of women's aid and this did help me because they had my interests at heart. It helped me wean myself off being entirely directed by someone else.

They knew what he would do and say, how he would behave before he did and this amazed me at the time. I used to sit and think 'How can they possibly know him so well without ever meeting him?!'

Most of this support has gone now, women's aid no longer does counselling here (they refer), legal aid is restricted and even though you can access it in cases involving abuse this requires that you know you have been being abused – it took a long time for me to understand this and I still have times when I find it unbelievable, most of the practical and social support I benefitted from can no longer be accessed.

I still feel as if the children's centre (gone) and women's aid (mostly gone) had such an enormous positive effect on me just by recognizing reality and by helping deprogram me from his control and to start learning that I had been being abused. It was a moment when I realised for the first time that this was not just a sequence of individual experiences that had randomly happened in my life but it was actually part of a societal phenomenon, a pattern, that could be deciphered via political and philosophical analysis. That it was structural.

If I had been in any way connected to the idea that I had any power and control then I think I would have aborted all of the children.

The fact that I was forced into the first abortion does not mean I now feel it would have been better if I had had the child. The fact that I had the second two children does not mean that I am happy with being a mother or that I chose to become a mother in the beginning or that I chose to have the abortion prior. Life unfolds based on what has gone before. The idea that one has choice depends entirely on one knowing that one does and on clearly seeing the choices available. I also think this is influenced by stigma, social and economic sanctions I have faced as a result. Who can say how I would have felt if I had been able to make meaning of my life through work whilst raising the children?

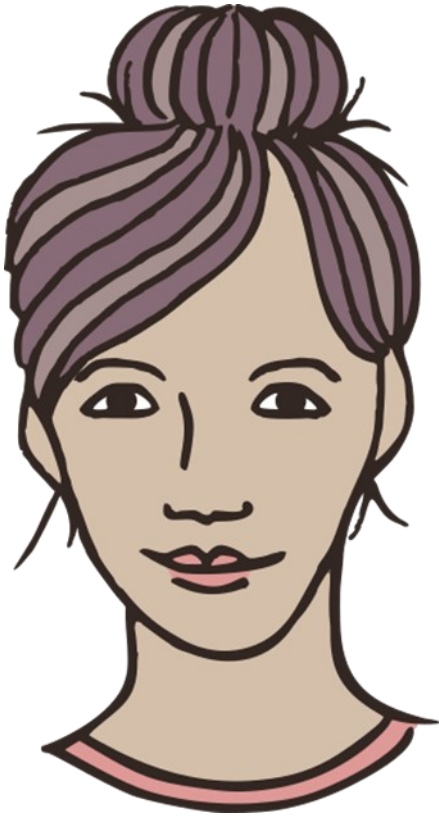
I know that I am a really good mother. Even though it is not a life I would choose I decided to learn/strive to be as good as I can at it. What does it actually matter what I did/didn't choose? What matters is what is. I know that I love my children in the way they should be loved. I know that I am a human being and that I am allowed to get things wrong and not be perfect.

None of this is lessened by the fact that, if I am brutally honest, and I had a free choice unburdened by 'what you are meant to think' and/or the sentimentality engendered by current reality; I would choose to go back to a point where I did not get pregnant at all or failing that I terminated the pregnancies. I know that this is a socially unacceptable way to feel. It is how I feel about my life, all feelings are valid because feelings are not actions and it is actions that really matter. I would never discuss these feelings with my children or allow them to show in my actions generally.

Acknowledging that this is how I feel and accepting it is something I find helpful in avoiding this feeling spilling out into my behaviour and my parenting.

The difficulty is if we are going back in time, how far would we be going back? Making my parents not be abusive? Require them to not have been abused so they didn't abuse me? Require his parents not abuse him? Make him not be abusive? and on and on – it's a futile exercise.

That said, I don't believe in the idea that there is any such thing as 'the right decision'. There are decisions that you make, there are decisions that are made for you, there are decisions you don't even know are being made/you are making. Things can seem very different with hindsight, unforeseen things happen. You cannot control all the variables and it is ridiculous to try. All you can do really is try and make the best decisions that you can with what information you can at the time and step up to take responsibility for the consequences that flow from them. To accept the hardships as part of living. Whether you chose it or not is irrelevant, it is, and so it must be handled as well and as responsibly as you can manage.



The advice I would give to other women is that there is no right choice. Don't look for one.

Whatever you decide or whatever happens without you engaging with choice is not as important as committing to dealing with the consequences (known and unknown) without engaging in self-blame. Accept that you cannot know all the implications of whatever you do now.

If you are considering choices regarding whether to continue with the pregnancy or not I would say there are two important things: 1. Are you prepared for the possibility that your life will forever be entwined with your abuser's through your child (and theirs too) and 2. Given that there is no 'right choice' and you cannot know what will happen, the important thing in my opinion is to make a choice that you feel is the right one now and simply commit to reminding yourself that you couldn't know the future and, when times are hard (everyone has hard times), that you made the best decision you were able to at the time and nobody could have expected you to do anything else.

I was relieved that Amber Rudd has recently implied that the government are not going to retrospectively apply the two child limit to those transferred to UC. I do not trust this not to happen though. I am basically trapped in the benefits system now.

When my eldest two's father left he brought a vexatious claim for access which took three years to finally be resolved and which involved a lot of unnecessary trauma for my children. Family court basically didn't rely on statements I made about anything and instead repeatedly wanted to 'give him a chance' so that they could 'see for themselves' – exposing my children to damage during their early years that they still carry now.

Fortunately legal aid was available then, though I know I could get it (providing I had evidence from cut back services) in those circumstances now, he would not have been able to afford to bring his case (or he would have spuriously claimed I was abusive!!) today. I'm not sure I would have had the strength to prove things to people back then without the support of womens aid (which doesn't exist here now). Eventually the court ruled his case was vexatious, that I had not prevented access, declined to make an order and ordered he apologise.

When I apply for the passports for the children, which I do even though we don't go away because I am worried about the possibility of him controlling their passports, I always have to disclose that he was abusive and that I cannot ask him for information. This just serves as a reminder I don't need.

The main thing though is that not only am I expected to be responsible for children I didn't choose to have in the first place, I am blamed for having them (I once appeared on the BBC and received weeks of hate mail) AND expected to take responsibility for making him a better man and father. This basically means that I am never able to deal with the trauma because I am constantly living in a dissociated state and in denial.

## Serena

I have a 5-year-old son from rape which occurred in a very violent relationship with a perpetrator between the ages of 17-22 years old. In this relationship, I was subjected to many forms of physical and sexual abuse. I did not tell the midwife what had happened.

I initially had a very hard time relating to and connecting with my baby, and suffered significant post-natal depression and trauma. I ran away and was in a refuge when a refuge worker talked to me about what had happened. It was the refuge worker who explained what rape was.

When I went to register the birth on my own, I tried to tell the registry office that I was raped and did not want to put the name of the father on the certificate. The registry office were very rude to me and told me that I would be committing an offence. I therefore lied to them and told them that my baby was born from a series of one night stands with men I didn't know, so I could claim I didn't know who the father was. This caused a lot of judgement at the registry office but it was the only thing I could think of in the moment.

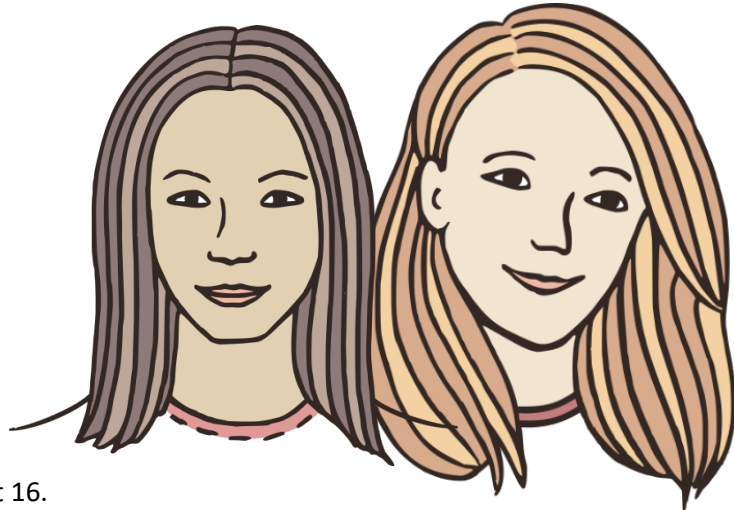
I'm with a long-term partner, and everyone assumes that he is my son's Dad. However, my son loudly proclaims to everyone that he is not his real Dad which has caused some difficulties at school. I have had some issues with the school and had to make it very clear that no one is to try to pick my son up, other than me.

The nursery school were very supportive but primary school have been more difficult about this. I have had ongoing and complicated issues in court about custody, too – with the offender being prosecuted at trial and my baby was used as evidence of the rape. This means that, in law, my baby has been proven to be biologically his, but in family court this seems to be being ignored and he is trying to get access to my baby even when the criminal court proved my baby was conceived through the rape.



## Katie and Lena

We both have sons from the same rapist. My son is 10 and Lena's son is 8. We were abused by the same perpetrator when we were children. We both went to the same school and knew each other. I was beaten, raped, abused and controlled for 5 years. During this time, I was pregnant twice. The first pregnancy ended in miscarriage when I was pushed down the stairs at 16.



I was then pregnant again a few weeks after my 17th birthday from another rape and had my son when I was 17. I was raped throughout the pregnancy. As soon as the baby was born I knew I had to escape to protect the baby. I left five months later and the violence escalated seriously. I reported it to police and the rapist was arrested and charged with 13 counts of sexual violence, rape, battery etc.

At the time the trial was awaiting start, the rapist met Lena and started to abuse her too. She was only 16 at the time. In 2010, she became pregnant and had a son. The relationship was extremely violent and she was raped repeatedly. Our two 'relationships' are almost identical in nature.

However, Lena was beaten badly and rang the police when her son was 10 months old. I remember seeing the pictures of her injuries and thinking how much braver he was getting with his violence. He never used to hit me in the face because it left obvious marks, but he had headbutted her 11 times in the face. Police arrested, charged the rapist and planned a trial. However, in the months leading up to the trial, the rapist came back to Lena and coerced her into sex with him and she became pregnant again.

She called me out of the blue, knowing I was the only other person who would believe her and asked me to come with her for a termination a week before the trial. I drove to her house to pick her up and took her to have the termination. I remember that they gave her a scan and made her look at the scan before she consented to the termination which disgusted me. She was only young.

I took her to the trial, too. I remember the shock on his face when he saw me there with her. The CPS successfully prosecuted him, but not for rapes. He was found guilty of battery. I did everything I could to support and attend the trial with Lena. Since this date in 2012, we have been friends and have always stayed in touch. We have recently decided to introduce our children as brothers and to tell them the truth. Both boys know that they have a biological father who is unsafe, but they have never met each other.

More recently, we found out that the same man had attacked another woman and she had become pregnant. He attacked her again at 26 weeks pregnant and she went into labour. The baby was born early and was in hospital for months. He has several disabilities and there has been no action taken against the rapist. We will both do what we can to try to support the woman and the new baby.

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Go to [www.victimfocus.org.uk](http://www.victimfocus.org.uk) for more research and reports

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