

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
25 November 2012  
Contact: Heather Harvey  
+ 44 (0)207 840 7130  
heather.harvey@eavesforwomen.org.uk

**Women's Groups call for 'Leveson debate' to 'wake up' to harm to women  
[Leveson Report due Thurs 29 Nov]**

A [new joint report](#) (WARNING: Nudity) by four leading women's organisations published today (25 November) finds that sexism in British national newspapers is endemic and that it leads to real harm to, and discrimination against, women in Britain. Both the report and an [open letter to David Cameron](#) were submitted to 10 Downing Street earlier today.

The women's groups are calling on Lord Justice Leveson, the government, the newspaper industry and all those with an interest in the 'Leveson debate' to look at the report's findings and to ensure that portrayal of, and harm to, women informs all proposals for the new press regulation regime.

The report, entitled 'Just the Women' (1), by Eaves, Equality Now, the End Violence Against Women Coalition and Object (2), is an evaluation of eleven British national newspapers' content over a two week period in September this year. It examines how crimes of violence against women are reported, how women are portrayed more broadly, and the general visibility of women in public life. The fortnight's study found over 1,300 pieces of editorial and images which illustrated these issues.

The report's key findings are:

- Crimes of violence against women are frequently reported inaccurately and without context, with a tendency to minimise the perpetrator's actions and to blame the victim
- Some tabloids contribute to the sexualisation of girls while purporting to condemn it; sexual abuse of children is sometimes presented in a way that minimises the abuse and is even on occasion titillating
- In many newspapers women are persistently portrayed as sex objects, alongside the mainstreaming and 'normalising' of the sex industry; this is also an area where the line between advertising and editorial is extremely blurred
- Regarding women in public life, younger women are visible but heavily stereotyped and infantilised, while older, disabled and black and minority ethnic women are less visible, and those in public life are often subject to ridicule.

The report refers to examples of poor reporting over the two week period including:

*"Killer Stoke Ace gets life"* (Sun) focuses on the loss of a footballer's potential career rather than his extremely violent murder of his 15 year old girlfriend

*"Alex Reid won't face criminal damage charges over his late night arrest"* (Mirror) reports humorously on the cage fighter trying to break into his girlfriend's house

“British business man accused of rape fails in anonymity bid” (Telegraph), lengthy article about the public school education and successful business history of a man accused of rape

*“Soldier stabbed ex-girlfriend to death after he hacked her Facebook account and discovered she’d had an abortion”* (Daily Mail)

“CAVORTING provocatively in a tiny pink swimsuit... little Ocean Orrey struts her stuff in a British beauty pageant – aged just FOUR” (Sun) whilst apparently concerned for her welfare, this report on a toddler beauty pageant portrays a young child as acting in a sexy and knowing way

*“They bang ‘em in Bangor...but there’s no sex in Essex”* (Sport) is a report on a student sex survey, an example of the frequent focus in some newspapers on the sexual conduct of female students; the report uses the language of pornography (“horny young learners”) and is accompanied by an image of near naked young woman in a bar. This story was run alongside a separate story about a sexual violence conviction which was minimising of the offence (‘Peeping Tom shower perv avoids prison’) and alongside explicit sex industry adverts.

*“Pop babe is latest upskirt conquest of papararsey Pete”* (Sport) is an example of tabloid newspapers’ frequent use of ‘upskirt photography’ whose captions and accompanying editorial present the images as exciting exactly because the subject is apparently not consenting to the photo being taken.

Reporting on the Cabinet re-shuffle during this period included editorial which was patronising, insulting and humiliating to women including Baroness Warsi and Maria Miller, including reference to women politicians’ choice of dress.

In none of these stories was there ever any reference to the scale of violence against women in the UK nor were there any quotes, opinions or explanations by experts.

Heather Harvey of Eaves said:

“These are categorically not matters of so-called ‘taste and decency’. The persistent portrayal of women as to blame for the abuse they suffer, as sex objects and as an insignificant part of public life, is very damaging. We need a full scale debate about how to turn this around.”

Holly Dustin of the End Violence Against Women Coalition said:

“Earlier this year the Head of the CPS in London spoke out about the way the media’s portrayal of rape undermines our justice system. Jurors come to trial with prejudices against female victims and media reporting may even deter victims coming forward in the first place. Numerous victims in the ongoing Jimmy Savile and other child abuse scandals have said, ‘I didn’t think anyone would believe me.’ Editors must look at their responsibility for this. It is not in the public interest for this situation to be allowed to continue.”

Anna Van Heeswijk of Object said:

“We fear too many of our decision makers are actually unfamiliar with the daily content of the red top tabloids. Page 3 in The Sun is emblematic of the persistent portrayal of women as sex objects in our press, but it is the tip of the iceberg. Page 3 sexism

accompanies a daily diet of upskirt photography, double page spreads of naked women with no news value, and explicit sex industry advertisements in newspapers like The Sport, and to a lesser extent The Star and The Sun. These images are so degrading that they were censored by the Leveson Inquiry, and removed from Facebook - despite the fact that they are contained within our unrestricted national newspapers. 'If you don't like it don't buy it' simply will not do when these products are on sale without restriction and thousands of copies are left lying around in public spaces every day."

Jacqui Hunt of Equality Now said:

"The Leveson Inquiry was set up to examine the ethics and conduct of the British press and whether these ever run against the public interest. It clearly runs contrary to the public interest to allow news reporting which regularly, directly or indirectly, has a negative, cumulative impact on women's rights. The Inquiry and the new regime which follows will not be complete unless this critical issue of the portrayal of women is addressed.

"The soft measures we are calling for are reasonable and overdue – a better complaints mechanism, an adjudicating body which includes equality expertise, some consistency with the broadcast watershed for publications carrying sexually explicit material."

The four campaigning women's organisations are calling on the government to examine Lord Justice Leveson's imminent proposals and then to consider instituting a new press regulation regime which:

- Allows third parties to make complaints; and allows for thematic investigations as well as those on individual cases
- Has clear guidance about women's equality in the text of the new code; and has accountable representative(s) of the equality sector as member(s) of the new body
- Makes newspapers' membership of the new body compulsory
- Requires consistency between the broadcast watershed for sexually explicit material and newspapers.

In the longer term, the four women's organisations are also calling for journalists to receive training on issues including sexism and myths and stereotypes about sexual and physical violence; and for the Culture and Media Select Committee, headed by Johan Whittingdale MP, to hold an inquiry into media sexism.

The new report highlights the fact that the government's strategy on ending violence against women in all its forms, and the work being lead by Number 10 on sexualisation which has included Mothers Union head Reg Bailey leading an inquiry and making recommendations on advertising, internet controls, music videos and video games, are both undermined by persistent media sexism and discrimination of the kind discussed.

ENDS

1. 'just the women' is what Newsnight editor Peter Rippon reportedly wrote in an email to a colleague concerning the lack of other authorities for evidence of Jimmy Savile's abuse.

2. The End Violence Against Women Coalition is the UK's largest coalition of organisations working to eradicate violence against women and girls; members include Rape Crisis England and Wales, Refuge, Women's Aid, The Women's Institute, Amnesty International UK and the TUC. Equality Now is an international human rights

organisation working to promote and protect the rights of women and girls around the world. With members in 160 countries we partner with local and grassroots groups to document discrimination and violence against women and mobilise international action to stop these abuses. Object is an award-winning human rights organisation which campaigns against the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture.

Eaves is a London-based charity that provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women. We also carry out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.

[Women's groups demand new watchdog to confront sexism in the media \(The Observer\)](#)