

The Whole Story – book review

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Investigating Sexual Crime – Truth, Lies and the Path to Justice by Patrick Tidmarsh

Going equipped

Author Patrick Tidmarsh invites us to look at the behaviours of both victims and offenders to question our assumptions and discard rape myths. This book guides the reader through a new way to investigate sexual offences, drawing on case reviews and anecdotes which make it very readable and compelling.

As the title suggests, Tidmarsh encourages investigators to take a ‘whole story’ approach. This tells you that sexual offending is a crime of ‘relationship’ that starts in the mind of the offender and develops over time. Because the ‘relationship’ is the context linking the events of offending, it is essential to understand this whole story to interpret the victim’s behaviour. This challenges traditional methods of investigation which focus on victim behaviour.

He reminds us that offending always starts with offenders and to focus the investigation on the suspect from the start. He describes the dynamics of relationship-based crime and grooming, explaining why some victims will choose to stay silent and how perpetrators force them into compliance. The book provides a sensitive study of how the justice system has failed victims and how there is a need for a deeper understanding of the subject to achieve better outcomes.

This is illustrated in a case where a young man is raped by a stranger but is initially dismissed by detectives as they were unfamiliar with the concept of male rape. Their obvious disbelief made the victim feel humiliated. Their sergeant told them to investigate the allegation and they found the suspect, who fortunately had kept evidence of the crime. He was subsequently convicted.

The increasing demands on courts to improve efficiency often results in rushed trials based on fractions of the material collected. Key parts of a victim’s story are often excluded, reducing years of abuse down to a few A4 pages in a jury bundle. Tidmarsh encourages investigators to delve into every element of the victim’s experience and behaviours to fully understand the abuse they suffer.

The relationship between victim and offender can often be illustrated through social media, but this only ever tells a fraction of the story. Tidmarsh writes of a woman getting exasperated when cross-examined in court. The barrister intimates that by looking at her social media, she seemed to be in a positive relationship. She snapped: 'Haven't you ever seen rape in a marriage before, but they still love each other?'

Evidence from social media can present patterns of abusive and grooming behaviour. However, it can also show a more complicated relationship, which can be used by the defence to damage the victim's credibility.

The book has informed the [Operation Soteria principles](#), which enable the transformation of investigations to be suspect focused, victim centred and context led. I would encourage all investigators of sexual offences to read this book. It does not discuss the challenges of embedding this approach within policing, but as a police officer myself, I recognise how important it is to use a whole story approach in rape and sexual assault investigations to achieve true justice.

- This article was peer reviewed by T/DS Mollie Kennerley, West Yorkshire Police

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