

# THE FALSELY ACCUSED MEN

*The Forgotten Abuse Victims and How to Help Them*

Thank you to Phil Mitchell for this article.

Abuse can take many forms, and one type that is often ignored, minimised, and given very little credible attention is false allegations of abuse. For over 20 years, I have worked with boys and men affected by various forms of abuse. While my work has focused

predominantly on sexual abuse, this has naturally led me to encounter cases of domestic abuse and false allegations. Many victims experience more than one type of abuse simultaneously. For example, boys who are sexually abused by an older woman may later be falsely accused by their perpetrators of sexual assault, while men who experience domestic abuse at the hands of a partner may be falsely accused of initiating violence. There is often significant overlap, with individuals simultaneously affected by sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and false allegations.

## DATA

A common response when false allegations are highlighted is to claim that they are rare. This retort typically refers only to false allegations of rape, rather than false allegations of other forms of harm or abuse, meaning only part of a much larger picture is being considered. A meta-analysis examining false allegations of sexual assault, including rape, found that approximately 5.2% of reports were confirmed to be false ([Ferguson &](#)



Malouff, 2016). Applying this percentage to the 152,989 reported rapes and sexual assaults in the year ending September 2025 (Office for National Statistics, 2025) equates to 7,955 false allegations – approximately 21 per day. A 2005 report examining Home Office data on reported rapes found that 9% of cases were designated false, with closer analysis reducing this to 3% (Kelly et al., 2005). Using ONS data for the year ending September 2025, this would equate to 2,228 false allegations of rape per year – approximately 43 per week. While some of these false allegations may not involve an identifiable individual, some certainly will, though the report does not elaborate on this.

A large international survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Domestic Abuse and Violence International Alliance (End to DV) asked nationally representative samples of adults (18+) in eight countries whether they had ever been falsely accused of abuse, including domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, or other forms of abuse. Fieldwork was carried out between February 22 and March 14, 2023, with sample sizes as follows:

- United States (N = 1,266)
- Great Britain (N = 2,040)
- Spain (N = 1,084)
- India (N = 1,009)
- Poland (N = 1,001)
- Australia (N = 1,025)
- Canada (N = 1,007)
- Argentina (N = 1,000)

Figures were weighted to be representative of all adults in each country. The survey found that 19% of adults in India, 10% in Australia, 10% in the United States, 8% in Canada, 7% in Argentina, and 4% in the United Kingdom, Poland, and Spain reported that they had been falsely accused of

abuse. According to the survey, most of those falsely accused were men, indicating that men represent a substantial portion of individuals affected by false allegations worldwide (Coalition to End Domestic Violence, 2023).

In a study examining male victims of intimate partner violence (Hines et al., 2015), among 611 men who sought help, 73.3% reported that their female partner threatened to make false allegations of sexual or physical abuse, and 55.7% reported that their partner actually made such false allegations. Additionally, 25.9% reported that their partner made false allegations of physical or sexual abuse involving their children. Writing for the Centre for Male Psychology, Rick Bradford (2022) argues that the main reason for the wide variation in reported figures is the criterion used to define “false”. While some of the percentages may seem low, the actual numbers affected are certainly not.

In a 2021 survey of 255 women, 18 admitted they had fictitiously claimed to have been assaulted either to official investigators, or to friends and family members. Their stated motives included revenge, fear, and embarrassment. Participants also rated the extent to which they could imagine a situation in which they would make a(nother) false claim in the future—101 (39.6%) of them rated this item positively to differing degrees (Bertsch & Matthews, 2021). In a study analysing Family Court of Australia judgements involving allegations of child sexual abuse, 25% of fully contested hearings in which a judge’s view could be determined contained a formal finding that the allegations were deliberately misleading – meaning the judge regarded them as

intentionally false (Webb et al., 2021).

## RESPONDING TO CLAIMS OF RARITY

Those asserting that false allegations are rare often attempt to validate their argument by comparing data on the prevalence of abuse with data on the prevalence of false allegations.

However, to reach a more accurate and balanced conclusion, we must compare the methods used to collect and report data on abuse with those used to collect and report data on false allegations, rather than relying solely on the figures themselves.

Every quarter, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports the number of sexual offences recorded by the police, broken down by specific offences such as rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and grooming (Office for National Statistics, 2025).

While data on offences such as perverting the course of justice and providing false or misleading statements are included, these are not disaggregated by type; some may relate to false allegations of abuse, while others involve unrelated behaviours.

Similarly, the Crime Survey for England and Wales asks participants about experiences of sexual and domestic abuse but does not ask about experiences of false allegations. This leaves an incomplete picture regarding the prevalence of false allegations. Given the much more robust effort devoted to collecting and reporting data on abuse compared with false allegations, it is problematic to claim that false allegations are rare. The methods used to gather this data are fundamentally different.

## NEGLECTING FALSE ALLEGATIONS

A survey of 1,838 adults in Great Britain gathered views around false allegation of rape. While the findings showed that the majority of participants (74%) think only a small proportion of rape claims are not true (YouGov, 2023), 61% agree that falsely accusing someone of rape is just as serious as the act itself (Mann, 2023). This view is not shared by all. Perhaps little effort goes into tackling false allegations because society generally cares far less about this type of abuse compared to other forms of harm. News pieces, media headlines, and government initiatives regularly condemn sexual and domestic abuse, arguing that these issues are a priority and must be eradicated. In comparison, little similar attention is given to false allegations.

I have worked with and spoken to falsely accused boys and men who reported that police informed them that even when evidence proved the accuser lied, the case could not be pursued because it was not considered in the public interest. In some instances, officers explained that pursuing the false allegation could deter genuine victims from coming forward. A well-known case involved a woman who falsely accused her father of rape at age 11, resulting in him spending 10 years in prison; she was not charged, as prosecutors feared pursuing her could discourage other victims from reporting sexual assaults (Daily Mail Reporters, 2012). In another case, a woman jailed for 18 months after falsely accusing three men of rape prompted a Detective Superintendent to note: "It is not often that the Force makes the decision to prosecute in these circumstances, for many different reasons, including any

vulnerabilities faced by the person making the allegation” (Kataria, 2025).

Some commentators reinforce this narrative. Meghan Joyce Tozer stated that if some innocent men’s reputations have to “take a hit” in the process of undoing the patriarchy, that is the price she is willing to pay (Neville, 2024). Similarly, feminist columnist Emily Lindin reportedly tweeted that she is not concerned about innocent men losing their jobs due to false sexual assault/harassment allegations (Blitzer, 2017). These perspectives, alongside legal framing – including offences such as perverting the course of justice (Crown Prosecution Service, 2024) and giving false information (United Kingdom, 1967) – suggest a system more focused on the public

justice process than on the harm to the falsely accused.

## EFFECTS

The effects of false allegations can be severe, traumatic and long-lasting. Consequences can include changes in self identity, stigma, change in attitudes towards the justice system, psychological and physical health impacts, relationship changes, impact on finances and employment, traumatic experiences in custody, and adjustment difficulties (Barry, 2025). Falsely accused men can experience anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD, depression, and suicidal ideation (Harman, 2025). Seventeen-year-old Jake Reid took his own life after students falsely accused him of rape (Lynch, 2023) and 14-year-old Kai Lloyd also took his own life after being falsely accused of stealing (Williams, 2025). Some falsely accused individuals do not take their own lives but have their lives taken by others. In 2020, French History teacher Samuel Paty was murdered after a pupil falsely accused him of Islamophobia. The student later admitted she had lied about the incident, reportedly saying, “I apologise for my lie that brought us all back here”. Although the murder was carried out by a radicalised attacker, her false allegation served as a catalyst for the events that led to his death (Averre & Salvoni, 2024).

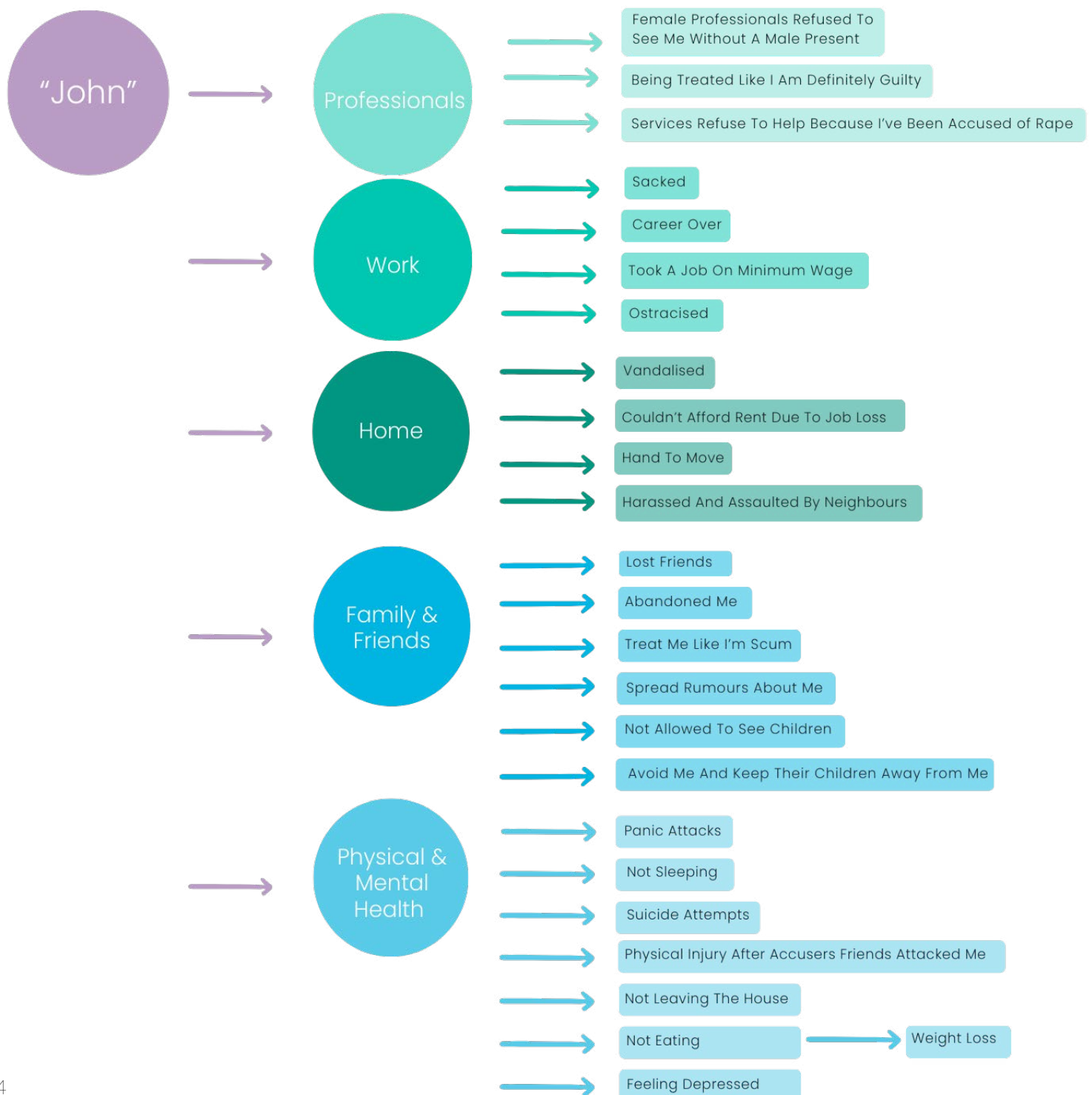


In a study exploring the help-seeking experiences of 302 men who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), some reported losing custody of their children, being prevented from seeing their children, and being falsely accused of IPV, or of abusing their own children, even when available evidence indicated that their female partners were the perpetrators of violence (Douglas & Hines, 2011).

Fig 1: Effects of being falsely accused. Permission given to share by "John" (not his real name).

## MALE-FRIENDLY THERAPY

With laws focusing less on how falsely accused victims are affected and more on how the legal system is impacted, coupled with the prevailing narrative that false allegations are rare and receive little serious attention, many falsely accused individuals can feel discarded and isolated. As therapists, our role is to believe what clients tell us (unless there is clear evidence to the contrary). I have worked with several men whose



previous therapists responded with caution and suspicion when they disclosed having been falsely accused – an experience that victims of abuse more commonly report as less likely to occur. Empathising with clients is a core part of our role, and it is arguably difficult if we approach disclosures of false allegations with scepticism.



When working with falsely accused men, I find that utilising elements of what Seager (2019) refers to as archetypal masculinity can help them process the trauma that often follows being falsely accused. The archetypes include fighting, winning, providing, protecting, mastery, and control – traits that are sometimes viewed negatively but can be harnessed positively. For men who feel their masculinity has been weaponised against them, it can be incredibly powerful to now use these aspects of masculinity to process trauma, regain a sense of control, and derive benefit from therapy. One simple way to achieve this is by adjusting the language we use. For example, we can offer empathic reflections alongside phrasing grounded in masculine archetypes:

*“It sounds like you’ve had an incredibly distressing experience, and now it sounds like you’re trying to take back control.”*

*“I can hear that you’ve felt really panicked, and I can also hear that even though it’s been extremely tough, you’ve shown real strength in trying to fight this.”*

Terminology underpinned by strength and action rather than weakness and vulnerability can make engaging with therapy and support feel more accessible for some men (Seager,

2019; Seager et al., 2022). This does not mean abandoning traditional approaches to therapy; rather, it recognises that there are average sex differences and that one size does not fit all.

Whilst some male clients may respond well to approaches that focus on accepting vulnerability, others are more likely to engage with methods that emphasise strength and control. A survey of 1,907 Australian men showed that feeling emasculated predicted disengagement from therapy (Seidler et al., 2021). Therefore, if male victims of false allegations feel emasculated when they are falsely accused, expecting them to engage in a process that focuses primarily on vulnerability – and less on masculine archetypes – may not be effective.

Rather than saying false allegations are rare, it may be more accurate to say that proven false allegations are rare. For allegations of harm that are not legally proven true or false, we may never know the truth. As uncomfortable as this may be for some, there are individuals who will weaponise and manipulate the concept of victimhood to harm or abuse others. While we cannot assume that all allegations that do not result in a guilty verdict are false, we also cannot assume they are all true – at least we can aim to provide useful, fair, and equitable support to victims of all forms of abuse.