

Nine fined for naming rape victim online

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Nine people are ordered to pay £624 each for revealing the identity of a woman raped by footballer Ched Evans on social networking sites.



Following footballer Ched Evans's conviction for rape at Caernarfon crown court in April, the victim's name was circulated on social networking sites, including [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

The former Sheffield United and Wales striker was found guilty of raping a 19-year-old woman in a Rhyl hotel room.

In one of the first cases of its kind, seven men and two women, aged between 18 and 27, were accused of revealing the victim's identity online. In court, all of the defendants said that they were not aware that naming her online was a criminal offence.

They have been ordered to pay £624 each in compensation to the woman who was named.

Another 24-year-old woman pleaded not guilty to the charge and will appear in court on 21 January..

Some of the defendants launched abuse at the victim saying that she was "crying rape", calling her names and implying the allegation was motivated by financial reasons.

The defendants included Evans's cousin Gemma Thomas from Rhyl, north Wales, who named the victim on her Twitter account and called her a "money grabbing slut" and "dirty slapper", and his friend Craig McDonald, from Prestatyn, also north Wales.

"Today's convictions send a clear message that social media sites are seen as no 'softer' by the law than any traditional written media outlets when dealing with the publication of inappropriate material," said James Danks, senior associate at Russell-Cooke law firm.

"With the speed at which information can now be put into the public sphere, the real likelihood is that any effective enforcement needs to be done hand-in-hand by the regulators and those operating the sites.

"Will the fines stop others naming victims of rape? That's something that only time can tell but what people will now be aware of is that naming a victim will lead to a criminal conviction, something that has wider consequences than just the mere financial impact."

Maximum penalty

All nine were all charged with publishing material likely to lead members of the public to identify the complainant in a rape case, contrary to the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 1992. District Judge Andrew Shaw ordered the defendants to pay the victim compensation of £624 each and the court was told that a fine was the maximum penalty this charge could attract.

The other defendants from north Wales were 25-year-old biology school teacher Hollie Price from Prestatyn, Benjamin Davies, 27, of Rhyl, Michael Ashton, 21, of Llandulas and Dominic Green, 23, of Rhyl. The defendants from Sheffield were Paul Devine, 26, of Buchanan Road; Daniel Cardwell, 25, of Chapelton; and Shaun Littler, 22, of Handsworth.

Judge Shaw said rape was one of the only crimes punishable by a maximum sentence of life and that it was a crime against women which subjects them to the most intimate personal violation.

"You did so [identified the victim] without proper knowledge of the facts and without any heed of the feelings of the victim," he said.

'Deliberate malice'

Mr Shaw added that the defendants who were related or who were friends of Evans had posted the comments with "deliberate malice" and said: "your actions have re-victimised this woman again."

Evans was jailed on 20 April, and is due to appeal against the conviction at the court of appeal tomorrow

He admitted having sex with her, but the woman told the jury she had no memory of the incident - and the prosecution said she was too drunk to consent to sexual intercourse.

Nita Dowell, prosecuting, told the court that following Evans's conviction the case attracted a huge amount of interest nationally and internationally and that there were 6,000 hits about it on Twitter alone. The hashtag #ChedEvans was trending on Twitter soon after the court's verdict in April.

Ms Dowell said the victim was subjected to abuse and that North Wales police received numerous complaints from members of the public and from groups such as [Rape Crisis](#).

'Poor little victim'

She said the first defendant to be identified was biology teacher Holly Price. The court heard she re-tweeted a comment which named the victim and said: "money grabbing slut. poor little victim. WTF?"

Price later told police that she had been an "idiot" and wanted to apologise to the victim.

Thomas, who is Ched Evans's first cousin, named the victim on her Twitter account and called her a "money grabbing slut" and "dirty slapper".

Devine posted a comment on Facebook, which Ms Dowell said, was of "particular concern". The comment read: "She is to blame for her own downfall. Lets find her address." The court heard that Devine was angry as Sheffield United had just lost to MK Dons.