



‘Men and boys struggle with emotional literacy’

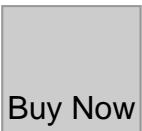
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‘Men and boys struggle with emotional literacy’

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“There’s a real sense of emotional illiteracy among men and boys and there are difficult emotions, difficult things that happen in life, but nobody teaches us how to process them.”

Ben Hurst, from the charity Beyond Equality which works with young men on tackling issues around violence against women and girls, and the topic of masculinity, has been speaking to Riz Lateef on her [BBC Radio London programme](#) on Friday.

Their conversation followed the news of the [sentencing of Hassan Sentamu](#), who repeatedly stabbed 15-year-old Elianne Andam outside a shopping centre in Croydon, south London, in September 2023.

He was ordered to spend at least 23 years in prison for her murder.

Ben believes there is a “real systemic issue” across the UK with how boys, and men, have been socialised to move through and experience the world.

He said it is about addressing the “attitudes beneath the behaviour”.

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The Old Bailey heard Sentamu had a history of aggression towards young people and girls.

In her sentencing remarks, Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb said on Thursday, when he was aged 11, he harmed himself and, unprovoked, assaulted other children at school.

She added: “While in foster care you used a knife to threaten a pupil who you thought was mocking you on a school trip. You threatened to stab another student with scissors. On another occasion you assaulted two female pupils at the school.”

The court also heard Sentamu had “not had the benefit of a settled and nurturing, childhood and family life”.

[Banzai Japan Music Video](#)

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Ben told BBC Radio London: “My heart breaks for Elianne and the Andam family, that’s a life that’s been cut short, potential that’s wasted that will never be seen.

“There’s also some kind of feeling there for Hassan, not in a sense of ‘I wish that hadn’t happened to him’, because we want justice ultimately, but we know the statistics about prisons, which don’t often lead to rehabilitation.”

“So the question remains, what happens to this young man who’s done this thing and how do we move

forward? Two wasted lives,” he added.

Ben believes there are real issues with how boys are able to process situations.

He said: “They manifest in a range of different ways and lots of ways that are widely inappropriate – and you add that to the context of sexual harassment, sexual violence, gender-based violence, men’s violence against women and girls, men’s violence against men.”

The court heard the day before Sentamu killed Elianne, she and her group had teased him and thrown water over him in an attempt to get him to apologise to his ex-girlfriend.

Jurors were told that later that day the teenager had told a friend he [felt there had been disrespect](#) shown to him by Elianne and her group.

The court heard that Sentamu had called the friend and told him: “I can’t let this slide.”

[Elianne’s cousin, Reverend Denzil Larbi, told BBC London](#): “We knew exactly what that meant,” Rev Larbi told BBC London. “We knew it meant he’s going to bring some sort of harm.

“I honestly believe if it wasn’t Elianne it would have been someone else, and so yeah, he was looking to bring some sort of revenge that day.”

In his victim impact statement, Rev Larbi told Sentamu he had committed “the most monstrous and evil act that is imaginable”.

He told BBC London he questioned whether more could have been done to prevent Elianne’s murder.

“What would have happened if maybe another male took him by the hand and maybe invested in him and mentored him?

“Or if other organisations really took him by the reins and said: ‘Yes, we recognise you’re struggling here, we’re here to listen’.

“I really wonder if maybe my cousin would still be here.”

Croydon Council said there were no plans for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review to examine Sentamu’s care.

Rev Larbi said Elianne’s family hope to work with schools to talk to young people about the dangers of carrying a knife.

“There are many Hassans just walking around Croydon. Young boys who are angry, young boys who are lost, young boys that want to be listened to.

“But I do believe there are great people in our community, great organisations who are in place who can really help and support these young people.”

‘Violent, calculated crimes’

Outside court after the sentencing on Thursday, Pastor Mark Rossell, from New Life church in Croydon, issued a statement on behalf of the family.

“Our daughter Elianne Andam was a vibrant, bright and loving innocent 15-year-old with her entire future ahead of her, until it was stolen in the most horrific way.

“Brutally killed in broad daylight by a 17-year-old who showed no mercy.”

Mr Rossell said the justice system had “failed to reflect the sheer brutality” of Elianne’s killing and that the Andam family were critical of Sentamu’s minimum term, saying it had left them feeling “abandoned and unheard”.

He added: “We cannot accept such lenient sentences are appropriate for violent, calculated crimes like this.

“The current legal framework does not deter young individuals from committing violent crimes, it does not provide sufficient accountability for those who commit the most heinous acts.”

Ben told BBC Radio London the work of Beyond Equality is “preventative”, to have conversations with boys, and men of all ages, before these situations arise.

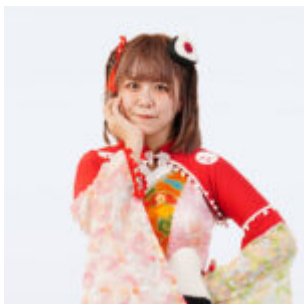
Their aim is to try to address gender equality “through the lens of masculinity”, with an approach that asks the questions, “what is masculinity, how does that feel, do we like it, would we change it if we could?” and to build a picture about stereotypes, norms and the expectations from there.

Ben added: “It’s an epidemic – it’s not decreasing, we all need to find a role in this conversation.”

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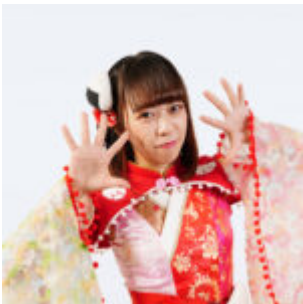
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Date Created

March 14, 2025

Author

admin