

Abuse scandal rocks charities

By [Aaron Fox](#)

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"I want to apologise deeply and unreservedly for my past behaviour and for the hurt and offence that I have caused." After the Harvey Weinstein furore and the #MeToo movement, words like these from a prominent public figure addressing a claim of improper conduct are all too familiar. But few would have expected these words to be uttered by Brendan Cox, the widower of Jo Cox MP.

Following the murder of his wife at the hands of a political extremist, Cox responded to the tragedy with a plea for calm; though it would be a time "More difficult, more painful, less joyful, less full of love," he refused to let the tragedy cause any more division. "She would have wanted two things above all else to happen now: one, that our precious children are bathed in love, and two, that we all unite to fight against the hatred that killed her," he said in a statement at the time.

Now Cox stands accused of inappropriate behaviour towards a colleague while working for Save the Children, an international charity, in 2015. The accusation of a terrible action against an icon of hope, tolerance and optimism has left many shocked. Though the family of Cox's late wife will stand by him, others are repulsed. Cox should "say sorry and mean it, and then go away," wrote a founding member of the Women's Equality Party for The Huffington Post.

The accusations against Brendan Cox have come amid a wider outrage surrounding the deeds of others involved in the third sector. In early February, The Times reported that Oxfam aid workers had paid some of the survivors of the 2010 Haiti earthquake for sex. The director of the Haiti relief effort, The Times

alleged, invited prostitutes into his villa, which had been provided for him at Oxfam's expense.

Subsequent reports alleged that the charity had gone to great lengths to play down the misconduct of numerous aid workers overseas, failing to inform other charitable organisations of their workers' behaviour. The accusations against Oxfam's workers and its leaders' responses to their alleged behaviour have stained the charity's international reputation.

The alleged actions of Oxfam's workers raise numerous ethical qualms. Working in disaster zones such as in the aftermath of an earthquake, where food, water, warmth and shelter are scarce, aid workers possess the resources that can make the difference between a devastated population's survival and death. This puts the aid workers in an extraordinary position of power, one that could be – and may have been – manipulated in an act of selfish exploitation.

Since the scandal broke, over seven thousand donors have withdrawn their contributions to the charity. Celebrities and public figures who once championed the organisation's aid efforts have publicly ended their support. Oxfam's supporters have tried to maintain their donors' loyalty, insisting that the actions of a few should not spoil the reputation of the many. "We are so sorry," began Oxfam's letter to its supporters. But these pleas have not done enough to maintain the support of the largest contributor to Oxfam's funding, the government.

Critics of the foreign aid budget have seized on the Oxfam workers' use of prostitution to ask whether it is right that the government should be committing so much money to overseas aid. Why give Oxfam the public's money if it will be spent on prostitutes and sex parties with underage participants?

The indictments against Brendan Cox, Oxfam, Save the Children and others have shaken our faith in the third sector. It is hard to imagine that those dedicated to alleviating the extreme suffering of others could be prone to exploiting them or others working with them. But if the #MeToo movement has taught us anything, it is that sexual assault is widespread, even in the most unexpected places, committed by the most unlikely of supposedly altruistic people.



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