

Japan's Secret Shame: journalist Shiori Ito says rape is a "taboo topic" in her country ahead of new BBC documentary

BBC2 follows Japanese journalist Shiori Ito, who shocked her home country in May 2017 when she went public with allegations that she was raped by a well-known TV journalist



By [Flora Carr](#)

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There's a moment in [BBC2's documentary Japan's Secret Shame](#) where Japanese journalist Shiori Ito returns for the first time in three years to a Tokyo hotel, where she alleges she was raped by a prominent TV broadcaster and reporter.

"I can already feel that my body is reacting," she says in the programme. It's night-time, similar conditions to the evening of the alleged attack. "It's the light I remember, this light," Ito adds, looking up at rows of hotel windows. There's a pause. "I have to go."

It's a moment of vulnerability that Ito, 29, first considered cutting from the final film, which documents the story of her case and the reaction it received in Japan.

It was in 2015 that Ito alleges she was raped by Japanese TV journalist, Noriyuki Yamaguchi, whom she had approached for career advice. Yamaguchi denied the claims, and in July 2016 the case, based on a criminal complaint filed by Ito, was dropped by prosecutors.

However, Ito has refused to let the issue lie, instead confronting what she calls the "taboo topic" of sexual assault in Japan. The BBC2 documentary explores why criminal charges against Yamaguchi were never brought, and how Ito is now pursuing a civil case against Yamaguchi.

From the beginning, Ito tells RadioTimes.com, she tried to treat her case as an outside journalist might: "I was telling myself, 'I'm a journalist and I have to cover this story' – to separate myself from [being] a victim."

However, the night outside of the hotel, where Ito experienced “a big panic attack”, was “shocking” for her. She debated with director Erica Jenkin over whether or not to include the footage: “I thought maybe I’m bringing the wrong message, as a victim, that I’m pretending I’m OK but I’m not OK.”

Of course, she adds, an image of her crying might be exactly what’s needed to convince viewers to believe her. She describes how, when she went public with her allegations in May 2017, she was told that if she didn’t cry no one would believe her: “I should look like a victim.”

Ito claims that she woke up in Yamaguchi’s hotel room, having blacked out in a restaurant toilet. In the documentary, we see footage of him chatting about the night with two male colleagues. Yamaguchi refers to Ito’s drunken behaviour on the night of the alleged assault (Ito believes that she was drugged during their dinner together, but admits she has no evidence of this). One of Yamaguchi’s colleagues tells him, “I hate drunk women, you did well to put up with it”.

Ito's story shocked Japan: "Talking about rape and sexual violence was such a taboo topic," she says. In a 2014 survey [cited by The New York Times](#), more than two-thirds of Japanese women surveyed who had reported rape said they had never told anyone, not even close friends or family members. Just four per cent said they had reported the rape to the police.



Shiori Ito (BBC)

Ito is critical of how sexual assaults are investigated in her home country: the documentary shows how, in Japan, alleged victims of sexual assault and violence must lie on a mattress as a life-size doll is pushed down on them, re-enacting the attack for the police.

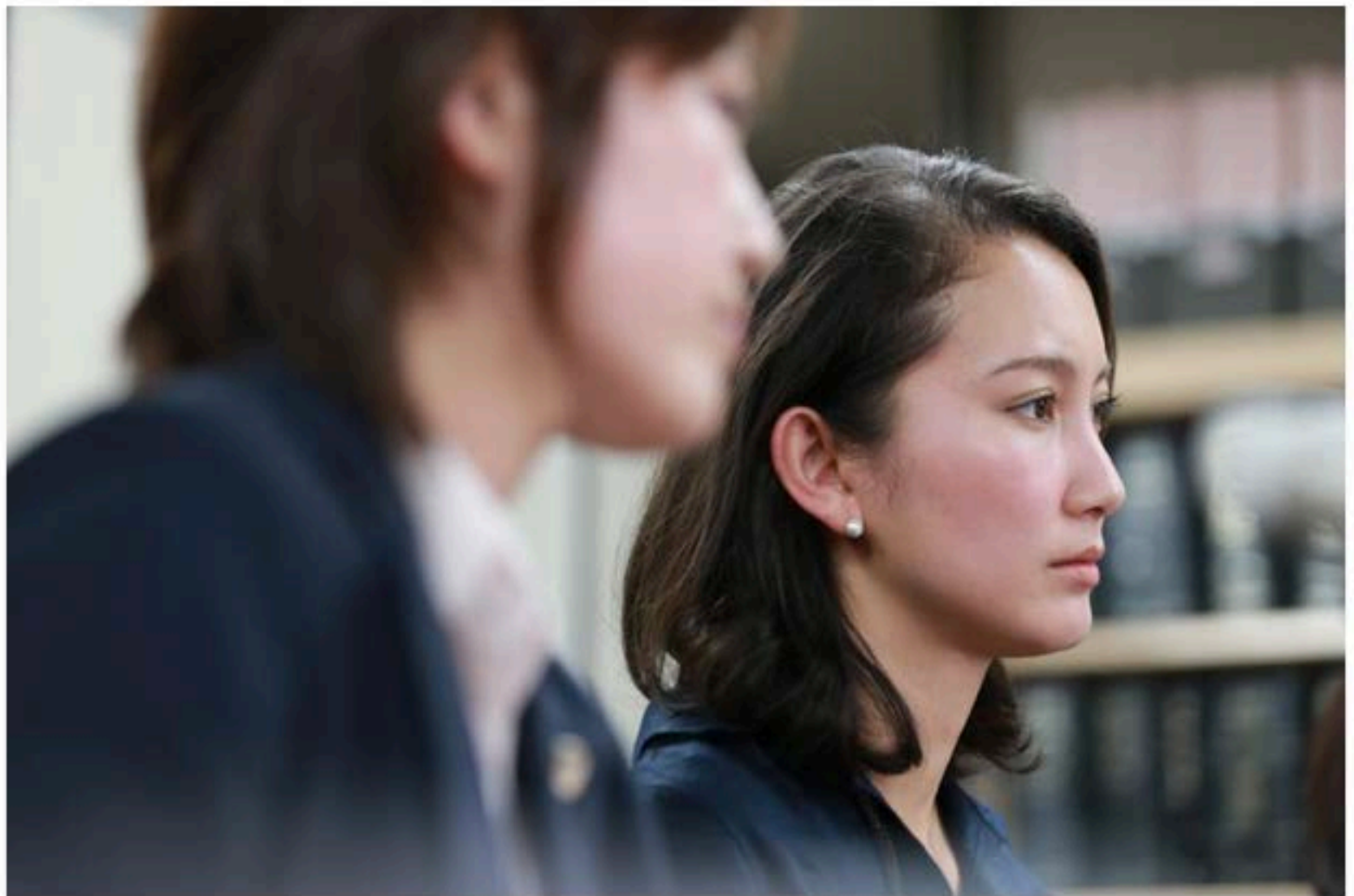
"Covering this story in Japan was just impossible," Ito says. "That is why I decided to do it with the BBC."

The BBC2 documentary examines the effect going public has had on Ito's life; there's a scene in the film where Ito and her flatmate search for hidden microphones in their kitchen, and another where Ito scrolls through her hate mail. She says that she's taken to wearing "fake glasses" to conceal her identity because of the amount of negative media attention her story has garnered.

The filmmakers and Ito also investigate the various institutions that she believes failed her, from the government to a rape centre, as well as speaking with victims of sexual assault in Japan.

Working with a British crew helped with the process, Ito says. "They weren't afraid to ask questions against the people who have [the] opposite idea of the story," she says, "I don't think that any Japanese media could have done this, so that was really brave of them."

The backdrop to Ito's story, and perhaps the reason she has gained as many followers as she has detractors, is the #MeToo movement: "There are many people [whispering or saying '#MeToo'](#) in Japan, but [who] can't say it out loud for their safety," she says. In the documentary, Ito receives a parcel of letters, expressing support ahead of a court date.



Shiori Ito with her lawyer, at the press conference in which she accused Noriyuki Yamaguchi of raping her (BBC)

The filming process was cathartic, Ito explains, but she found being interviewed about the alleged rape "traumatic".

"I've had to talk about it many times, but... it's never been easy," she says. However, she found being "on the other side of the chair" instructive: "As a journalist, I'm always the one asking questions."

The film will be aired on the BBC, but Ito also hopes viewers in Japan will see the film, and that it will spark a national conversation.

"When it comes to talking about sexual violence and rape these days, there's still a stigma around it [in Japan], but I do think it's changing," she says. "I think the landscape has changed – slowly but surely."

Japan's Secret Shame is on BBC2 at 9pm on Thursday 28th June