

women's asylum news

refugee women's resource project @ asylumaid

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New Women's Project Launched for Destitute Asylum Seekers

The Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) is a small charity that specializes in asylum support law (housing and welfare support for asylum seekers). ASAP have just launched a new Women's Project to help provide legal advice to women asylum seekers and to help prevent destitution. The Women's Project will draw on ASAP's expertise in asylum support law and train and advise voluntary sector organisations working with women asylum seekers in the UK. The new project will protect and promote women's legal rights to food and shelter and influence asylum support policy on issues that affect women.

Eiri Ohtani Coordinator at ASAP writes the article below to discuss ASAP's work and the Women's Project.

Unfortunately in the UK there are thousands of refused asylum seekers struggling to access food and shelter. Many of these destitute asylum seekers are women, some are victims of rape and sexual violence in their country or origin, some are mothers with children, and some suffer from serious mental and physical health problems. It is within this context that ASAP started its ground-breaking Duty Scheme work in June 2005, providing free legal representation at the Asylum Support Tribunal (AST). AST is the only tribunal in the UK that deals with

asylum support appeals. Unlike immigration appeals, there is no public funding (Legal Aid) for asylum support appeals. This means that many asylum seekers have no access to competent legal representation during their appeals and subsequently lose support and become destitute.

The issue of asylum support law is a relatively new and unexplored area of law. ASAP's experience has demonstrated the sheer complexity of the hardship many asylum-seeking women were experiencing as a result of being destitute. We were also surprised to find that the vast majority of the asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers at the tribunals had already endured a long period of destitution, lasting months and sometimes years.

One of the women ASAP met at the Duty Scheme was Sarah (not her real name).

Sarah was a refused asylum seeker who had made a fresh asylum claim. She applied for Section 4 support (a type of support for refused asylum seekers) because she was destitute and the fresh claim had been received by the Home Office but not yet processed. However, her application for support was refused because the Home Office did not believe she was destitute, saying that she had access to private means of support.

When ASAP met Sarah at the Duty Scheme she had been sleeping rough for nine months. She suffered from a serious medical condition that meant she occasionally lost consciousness without warning. She suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder having been raped and tortured in her country of origin, which caused many side effects including sleepwalking. In her desperation to find money and food she had turned to prostitution and was living in a squat with a man she worked for.

ASAP represented Sarah and argued that she was destitute. There were police reports stating she had been involved in prostitution and sleeping rough. Her doctor had also been very concerned about her health and safety. Sarah won her appeal.

Some asylum-seeking women we have known have had to provide sexual favours or domestic help in exchange for somewhere to stay or a floor to sleep on. Others were completely homeless and ended up sleeping at bus stops and stations trying to stay safe. What is even more worrying is that many of these vulnerable women had mental and physical health problems, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, suicide risks, some were HIV positive, had diabetes, heart conditions, cancer etc. Our work with these women showed how their mental and physical conditions deteriorated the longer they stayed destitute.

Many refused asylum seekers, including some women, are not able to get any help from the government. The government argues that refused asylum seekers are making themselves destitute by not agreeing to return to their country of origin. The government does not consider difficulties many asylum seekers face in accessing competent legal representation and the flawed asylum decision-making process. Furthermore, the policy of leaving women destitute whilst denying them a right to work lacks common humanity and decency.

However, some refused asylum seekers who meet strict eligibility criteria may be able to access limited support. This includes Section 4 support which is: 'short-term support if your application for asylum was unsuccessful, you are unable to return to the country you came from and would otherwise be homeless without

money to buy food'¹. Section 4 support consists of the allocation of controversial vouchers and accommodation only. Unfortunately, many people who have qualified for receiving Section 4 have experienced administrative errors and delays. Other vulnerable refused asylum seekers can sometimes receive support from their local authority, but again, it is very difficult.

This is where ASAP's Women's Project comes in. The project can provide information about eligibility for these support options and competent legal advice to ensure women who are entitled to statutory support get it.

This three-year project is funded by Comic Relief and will focus on working with women-centred organisations who are already working with destitute women asylum seekers. As part of the new women's project, ASAP's Legal Adviser, (Gerry Hickey) will provide second-tier advice and training to women's organisations as well as free legal representation at the Asylum Support Tribunal in Croydon.

In our experience, whilst many people in the sector have some understanding of immigration law, fewer people have accurate information about asylum support law. This is very unfortunate as without your most basic needs being met, how can you pursue your asylum claim? We believe that a general lack of competent advice in this area of law has left many questionable practices unchallenged for far too long. For example, ASAP's research into the quality of asylum support decision making found that over 80% of decisions made by NASS (which then became BIA and now UKBA) which forced failed asylum seekers into

destitution, contained misapplications and/or misinterpretations of law. Such a high 'error' rate would not be tolerated against any other group of people other than asylum seekers and should not be tolerated any longer.

As well as providing services that help individual asylum seeking women, the Women's Project also aims to influence asylum support policy with regard to gender issues and implications. For instance, the amount of maternity payments mothers receive on section 4 is inadequate and there are serious concerns about what happens when victims of domestic violence become destitute.

As the project has just been launched, issues regarding which women's asylum support issues to prioritize are still being negotiated. We are interested in hearing from women's organisations whom we have not spoken to before. We encourage groups to contact us about any concerns and issues you have regarding asylum-seeking women's support issues.

For further information about ASAP please visit: www.asaproject.org.uk

For more details about the Women's Project, please contact Gerry Hickey, Legal Adviser, at gerry@asaproject.org.uk.

ASAP's second-tier Advice Line is open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday – telephone: 0845 603 3884

New training available:
ASAP's Women's Project and the Rights of Women and are running training sessions *Protecting women from persecution: claiming asylum in the UK and financial support throughout the process* on 2nd June and 22nd September (see page 8 for full details).

¹ See Home Office website:
[Hhttp://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/workingwithasylum/support/section4/H](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/workingwithasylum/support/section4/H)

Special thanks to Eiri Ohtani for contributing this article.

Sector Update

An Equitable World for Women and Girls?

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) has published a report of Yakin Ertürk, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women's (SRVAW) visit to the UK in January 2007. The SRVAW's remit is to seek and receive information on violence against women and recommend ways to eliminate it and remedy its consequences. To do this she transmits urgent appeals and communicates to States to report alleged individual complaints, undertakes fact-finding country visits and produces annual thematic reports. She reports to the UN Commission on Human Rights. Her visit was an NGO European Regional Consultation held at Amnesty International's Human Rights Centre in January 2007 and was attended by about 100 women and men from 30 different countries.

The report: *'What Practical Steps Need to be Implemented in order to Achieve an Equitable World for Women and Girls?'* comprehensively covers the three key themes discussed with the SRVAW:

1. State, cross-state and international infrastructure.
2. Prevention, education, culture, stereotypes and the media.
3. 'Moving women' – migrant and asylum seeking women.

During her visit, the SRVAW repeatedly set out the underpinning problem of gender inequality in relation to violence against

women. In her introduction to NAWO's report, she states;

"While diverse policy environments with respect to Violence Against Women in the various countries in Europe were the focal point of the discussions, problems related to migration clearly dominated the consultation. Women, once perceived only as dependents of male migrants, have today become autonomous suppliers of labour in many sectors as a result of the feminisation of migration. Women are also becoming the main actors in the refugee flows as well as trafficked persons across national borders. Despite the growing urgency of problems encountered by women who are legal or illegal migrants in Western European countries, their plight remains marginal to public policy, which is driven today mainly by national security concerns."

The report provides quotes from many delegates covering a range of issues of concern to women seeking asylum including: lack of implementation of gender guidance; failure to take gender issues into account in decision making by the Home Office and immigration officials including the use of the internal flight alternative; detention and fast-track; forced removal; lack of transparency in the court systems; legal aid cuts and destitution. It provides 28 recommendations on this theme.

These include:

- To urgently, fully and consistently implement the Home Office's existing Gender Guidance (Asylum Policy Instruction on gender issues in the asylum claim).
- To ensure that the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal effectively implements its own gender guidance.
- To prevent women who have experienced gender based persecution

(including trafficking) from being placed in the fast-track procedure.

- To end the detention of women reporting rape and other torture.
- To implement a time limit on detention so women cannot be detained indefinitely.
- To implement an effective mechanism so that victims of torture cannot be detained.
- To ensure transparency about whether people can be removed or not to their countries of origin and to justify why they are detained.
- In determining whether an internal flight alternative is reasonable or not, the Home Office should consider relevant country information and the issues that will affect women if returned, in line with its own policy (the Asylum Policy Instruction on gender issues in the asylum claim).
- To extend measures to ensure access to legal services for all asylum seekers.
- To increase awareness amongst asylum-seeking women and service providers of NASS's policy (NASS Policy Bulletin 70) which seeks to remove perpetrators of domestic violence from NASS (Home Office) accommodation or to re-house victims.
- To train authorities to recognise symptoms that may indicate an asylum seeker is also a victim of trafficking.

For copies of *'What Practical Steps Need to be Implemented in Order to Achieve an Equitable World For Women and Girls'* report see:

<http://www.nawo.org.uk/upload/documents/document68.pdf>

Keeping Children Safe From Harm

The UK Border Agency's (UKBA) proposed Code of Practice on keeping children safe from harm fails to mention the situation where children have to attend their mother's asylum interview. This is despite concerns about this practice, highlighted in recent research such as *'Like any other child?'* by Barnardo's and *'Asylum seekers experiences of the new asylum model'* by the Refugee Council.

In RWRP's response to the consultation on the Code, we recommend that the Code of Practice should include UKBA providing childcare when clients attend their substantive interview.

For the 'Keeping Children Safe From Harm – Code of Practice consultation' see: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/consultations/keepingchildrensafe/>

For RWRP's response visit: www.asylumaid.org.uk

UK News

Access to health care - high court ruling

The Guardian reports on a significant ruling by the high courts regarding access to health care for asylum seekers who have not been ordered to leave the UK. The high court judicial review ruling stated "all failed asylum seekers, until their removal from the UK, should be considered by law to be ordinary residents and entitled to NHS care".

This ruling will have a considerable impact on many asylum seekers and it means that people whose asylum claim has been refused will be able to access medical care until the point they have been issued

removal directions. This includes pregnant mothers who will now be able to access hospital or GP maternity care free of charge.

The judicial review was focused around an asylum seeker (known as A) who cannot be returned to their country of origin but who was refused treatment for liver disease. The hospital in question said it was following NHS guidelines (2004) that charge 'failed' asylum seekers for treatment if they do not meet the legal definition of 'ordinary resident'. However, Mr Justice Mitting ruled that the interpretation of "ordinarily resident" had no legal basis and highlighted that most asylum seekers were "penniless".

Deborah Jack, chief executive of The National Aids Trust said: "For years failed asylum seekers have been denied free treatment for long-term conditions including HIV. Many have faced enforced ill-health as government policy has left them destitute and without healthcare."

The Department of Health have been granted permission to appeal the decision to the House of Lords. They argue that restricting access to NHS care for 'failed' asylum seekers is necessary as they believe asylum seekers come to the UK for free medical care. Campaigners argue there is no evidence to prove this assertion.

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/apr/12/immigration.publicservices>

For further information regarding this ruling and access to health for asylum seekers see MEDACT's website:

<http://www.medact.org/>

Women in Yarl's Wood Protest about detention of children

The Independent reports on recent protests by mothers in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. The mothers have protested that keeping children in detention is cruel and has contributed to their ill health. The women have gone on hunger strike and did a naked demonstration to raise awareness about the detention of their children. One of the demonstrators said "I took my clothes off because they treat us like animals. We are claiming asylum, we're not animals. They treat us as if we've done something terrible." For this woman, her two children (aged six and two) have been continuously ill since they were taken to Yarl's Wood. All the women wanted their concerns to be understood by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and for the introduction of a more humane policy.

The recent Independent Asylum Commission interim report '*Fit for Purpose Yet?*' openly criticised the detention of children as "wholly unjustified." Donna Covey, chief executive of the Refugee Council also states "We remain absolutely opposed to the detention of children under any circumstances. The evidence shows it is physically and emotionally harmful for children to be locked up this way, and there can be no justification for it." A spokesperson from the UKBA said: "Families with children are detained only where absolutely necessary and for as short a period as possible and in designated accommodation."

For full article see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/mothers-detained-in-immigration-centre-hold-naked-protest-807802.html>

Children who have been trafficked are disappearing in England

The Guardian reveals over 400 children who are believed to have been trafficked to the UK for the sex and drugs industry have gone missing from local authority care. The Freedom of Information Act data suggests that children from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe have disappeared from safe houses and foster homes. Child protection and anti-trafficking agencies believe this is due to children being re-trafficked or children running away in fear of being caught by their traffickers.

The information reveals that of the 408 children who have disappeared from the 16 local authorities around England's airports and ports, only 12 have been traced and subsequently returned to care.

Christine Beddoe, the chief executive of ECPAT UK states "These figures come in spite of the government's action plan on trafficking and show the need for an urgent inquiry into separated children who go missing. These vulnerable children need to be given independent guardians as soon as possible to ensure they are protected from traffickers who we know target them even while they are in care."

The Home Office have confirmed that they "are concerned about the number of children who go missing from local authority care each year who appear to have been trafficked". The Home Office have proposed to "identify a group of "specialist" local authorities which have effective procedures to keep children safe and to identify and provide proper services for the victims of trafficking. We intend to channel all cases to these authorities from around the country."

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/apr/23/childprotection.immigrationandpublicservices>

Funding for specialist women's services cut

Mary O'Hara writes about the need for specialist, targeted services for vulnerable groups. The article highlights the specific issue regarding 'no recourse to public funds' that affects women with 'insecure immigration status' including women who do not have indefinite leave to remain and are victims of domestic and sexual violence. O'Hara argues that targeted groups like these women and organisations that represent them are suffering as a consequence of 'single stream' funding initiatives.

The article outlines the current circumstances of Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a leading organisation that specialises in working with black and minority ethnic women. SBS have been campaigning vigorously on the issue of 'no recourse to public funds' and the impact it has on this specific group of women. For 30 years, SBS have received core funding from Ealing Council in London, however this year they face closure, as the council will no longer fund their activities. SBS believe this change in policy and funding priorities is a direct result of the 'Commission on Integration and Cohesion report' that states that 'single group funding should be an exception as opposed to a rule.' For SBS, this recommendation "fails to take account of the unequal social, economic and cultural context which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for black and minority women to access outside help or seek information about their rights." Similarly, The New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) report '*Women and Violence: A Hard Knock Life*' concludes that "The impact of violence on BME women may be worse than for other women . . . there are additional barriers to leaving their partners."

The NPC are an independent organisation that analyses charity performance and advises donors where to put their money.

With regard to SBS they advise they are "exactly the kind of successful organisation worth putting money into. Ealing Council would do well to read the report before it rushes to any decisions that could adversely affect the future of SBS"

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/apr/23/equality>

For further information on Southall Black Sisters see:

<http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/>

For the New Philanthropy Capital's *Violence Against Women: A Hard Knock Life* report see:

http://www.philanthropycapital.org/research/research_reports/community/violence_against_women.aspx

UK conferences & courses

Honour Killings and Honour Oppression

Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) conference

14th May 2008, London

IKWRO are holding their fourth annual conference exploring honour based violence and crime.

This one-day conference to be held at Amnesty International Human Rights Centre will include discussions around:

- Fighting against 'honour': barriers, progress and differences
- Experiences of honour crimes – including key case studies
- Children's services and 'honour' violence

- Establishing a national 'honour' network and helpline
- Police response: a new strategy

The conferences costs:

£40 per person from organisations/business

£20 per person from voluntary organisations

£10 per private individual

For further information see:

http://www.ikwro.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=292&Itemid=26

or email: ikwro@yahoo.co.uk

Protecting Women from Persecution: claiming asylum and financial support in the UK

Rights of Women and ASAP

2 June 2008, London

Rights of Women and Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) are organising a new one-day training course that focuses on the needs of asylum seeking women who experience gender-based violence. This practical course gives an overview of the legal asylum procedure. The course will explore who should be granted asylum or human rights protection, what kinds of financial support is permitted and how claims are determined. The course is aimed at female professionals in the statutory and voluntary sector.

The training will cover:

- The legal framework for protection (including the Refugee Convention 1951, the European Convention on Human Rights 1950 and the EU Qualification Directive)
- Application for asylum in the UK (including the New Asylum Model and Legacy Cases)
- The different types of status given

- and refusals
- Financial support available throughout the process
- Different types of protection given, including refusal and appeals
- Financial support available for 'failed' asylum seekers including section 4 support
- Information regarding supporting asylum seeking and refugee women

For more information about the course including booking details and costs contact:

Rights of Women - Tel: 020 7251 6575/6

Email: training@row.org.uk

'Rights of Women' have produced a 2008 training brochure, outlining all of the courses they are facilitating across the UK in 2008. For full list of courses and information please consult the brochure available at:

<http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/current.php>

Violence Against Women: Histories, Methodologies, Activism and Research **University of York**

30th May 2007, York

The Centre for Women's Studies have organised this one-day conference to discuss current debates and research in the field of violence against women. The conference will cover issues relating to domestic violence, rape in war and war crimes, men and violence and representation of violence.

Plenary discussions will include:

- Three decades of well founded fear: where are we now in measuring violence against women
- Gender violence and conflict: revisiting violence and the social control of women

- Exploring domestically abusive relationships
- Adjudicating sexual violence in armed conflict: The international criminal court
- Studying media in the context of violence against women

Confirmed speakers include: Prof. Catherine Donovan, Prof. Jill Radford, Prof. Liz Kelly, Prof. Jeff Hearn, Prof. Marianne Hester and Julie Bindel (journalist and activist)

For further information including detailed programme and costs see:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/gsp/violenceconf.htm>

Forced Marriage Course and Honour Based Violence

Ashiana

7th July 2008, London

This one-day training course aimed at professionals will develop a greater understanding of forced marriage and honour based violence.

The session will cover:

- Definitions of forced and arranged marriage
- Knowledge of the cultural roots surrounding forced marriage
- Information on marriage law
- An insight into the effects of forced marriage
- Different types of honour based violence
- Suggestions on how to deal with culturally sensitive cases

The course costs:

£110 - Statutory agencies

£80 - Voluntary agencies

For further details and booking information

please telephone: 020 8539 0427 Fax: 020 8539 6800 or email: info@ashiana.org.uk

International News

Iraq: Honour killings

The Independent report on the 'honour killing' of Shawbo Ali Rauf in Iraq who was murdered by her in-laws because she had an unknown telephone number on her mobile phone. Similarly, 17 year old Rand Abdel-Qader was murdered recently by her father who accused her of being 'infatuated' with a British soldier. In Basra, southern Iraq the police acknowledge that 15 women were killed last month for religious crimes regarding their dress codes, however campaigners believe this figure to be much higher. Reports of increasing violence against women in Iraq comes just after the one year anniversary of the stoning to death of Du'a Khalil Aswad, whose killing was filmed and posted on the internet. To date, nobody has been prosecuted for her murder and according to her father, her family are still considered 'outcasts' in their local community. In a recent speech her father said: "My daughter did nothing wrongshe was mutilated, her body dumped like rubbish... I want those who committed this act to be punished but so far they have not, they are free. Honour killing is murder. This is a barbaric act."

The article currently outlines that in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, Sharia law is being implemented and according to Houzan Mahmoud "if before there was one dictator persecuting people, now almost everyone is persecuting women." Mahmoud, who now has a fatwa against her for petitioning to remove Sharia law states: "in the past five years it has got much worse. It is difficult to describe how terrible it is, how badly we have been pushed back to the dark ages. Women are being beheaded for taking their veil

off. Self-immolation is rising – women are left with no choice. There is no government body or institution to provide any sort of support. Sharia law is being used to underpin government rule, denying women their most basic human rights." For Mahmoud "honour killings and murder are widespread. Thousands ...have become victims of murder, violence and rape – all backed by laws, tribal customs and religious rules. We urge the international community and the government to condemn this barbaric practice and help the women of Iraq."

For full article see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/barbaric-honour-killings-become-the-weapon-to-subjugate-women-in-iraq-816649.html>

Pakistan: Violence against women

The BBC report violence against women in Pakistan more than doubled to 4000 cases in 2007. In addition, more suicide attacks took place last year than any other year combined and in 2007, 636 women were victims of 'honour killings'. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan who launched these finding believe that conservative social practices and religious extremism have contributed to the high levels of gender inequality and have resulted in "a brutal year for women." The Human Rights Commission also believe that the statistics are a "gross understatement" as many women do not report crimes committed against them.

The report raises concerns over a general apathy with regard to women's rights. The research also discusses how the decline in girls attending school is an emerging worrying trend, especially in the north-western region where Taliban militias have recently bombed girl schools. For full article see:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7349167.stm

For the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's *State of Human Rights in 2007* see:

http://www.hrcp-web.org/hrcpDetail_pub3.cfm?proId=528&catid=173

India: Acid attacks against women

The BBC report on the rising cases of acid attacks (the use of highly corrosive acid to injure or kill) in India, with cases also rising in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Information available reveals victims of acid attacks are women who are predominantly poor and have often rejected a man. The attacks are pre-meditated, with the intent on killing or disfiguring.

This article outlines stories of women who were attacked by men they knew, who threw acid over their face and body leaving them permanently disfigured. The women describe how since the attack they found it difficult to maintain or gain employment and continue a 'normal' life.

Currently, there are no national statistics available confirming the number of women targeted in acid attacks across India. A pressure group, 'The Campaign and Struggle Against Acid Attacks' (CSAAAW) have launched a campaign in Karnataka (southern India) to raise awareness about the issues. The 'National Commission for Women' are also currently exploring the possibility of a medical scheme for acid attack victims. At present, medical and reconstructive treatment is too expensive for women to access.

For the women however, the difficulties they face after an acid attack are not only medical, but also they face cultural and legal obstacles. The legal system in India is often seen to be in favour of men and acid attacks are frequently considered as non-criminal. In many cases that are reported, offenders can delay sentencing,

receive light sentences or are never prosecuted.

Anubha Rastogi of the Human Rights Network comments on the attacks, pointing at the need for change within the culture of the legal system as well as a call for limits on acid sales. Rastogi also believes that attitudes between men and women in India need to change and women need to be recognised and respected as individuals with the same access to rights as men.

For full article see:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7270568.stm

Afghanistan: Domestic violence

IRIN report on a horrific case of domestic violence in Afghanistan. This article outlines the story of a 16-year-old woman who was tortured by her husband. Her husband cut off her ears, her nose, broke her teeth and shaved her hair. For the woman, the violence from her 40-year-old husband started after only two weeks of marriage.

The woman talks about how her husband became paranoid that other men were visiting her whilst he was not at home. She also describes the horrific violence she endured during her three-month marriage. She states: "he knocked me down, bound my hands, and then broke my teeth with a stone. He also poured boiling water on my feet. After this I could not walk and was in a lot of pain, but he said I was only pretending." As her husband had banned visitors to her house she could not inform anyone of the abuse she was suffering. "One night I could not cook dinner for him because I could not stand on my feet. He got so upset when he found that there was nothing for him to eat. He started beating me. Again, he bound my hands with a piece of cloth. I felt a terrible pain in my left ear and then blood was flowing down my face. I thought that he wanted to kill me so I started screaming. Then I felt a

similar pain in my right ear and more blood.....I felt the worst pain in my life only a few seconds later when my husband used his knife to cut off my nose. I then fainted."

The woman has been treated in hospital in southern Afghanistan for her injuries as well as psychiatric distress. She currently does not know where her husband is.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/HOVReport.aspx?ReportId=76003>

Afghanistan: Girl children at risk of being sold

BBC Radio Fours 'Seven Days' programme explores how poverty is forcing many families in Afghanistan to sell their young daughters at an early age. The programme follows a 13-year-old girl from the region of Badakhshan, who was sold to her father's cousin. She states: "I didn't want to marry, it was my parents' decision...I dreamed I would be able to finish my education. I had no choice." Fauzia Kofi, MP explains how she knows of a recent case whereby a nine or ten-year-old girl was sold for 'wheat and two cows.'

The programme includes a midwife from the same region who discusses how she helped a ten-year-old girl give birth "The girl was so small. I held her in my lap until the child was born." Both Kofi and the midwife believe that poverty fuels the high levels of child brides. According to UN statistics, more women die in childbirth in Badakhshan, northern Afghanistan than anywhere else in the world. Findings also show that girls under the age of 15 in Badakhshan are at an increased risk of maternal deaths.

For an article relating to the Radio Four Programme see:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/7342902.stm>

CAR: Sexual violence

IRIN report on the lack of funding and resources available to assist women who have been raped and experienced gender based violence in the Central African Republic (CAR). The article outlines the current difficulties for an NGO in Northern CAR who work with women who have survived sexual violence, many of whom are HIV positive. There are currently no accurate statistics available which reflect the number of women who have experienced rape and sexual violence in CAR. This is primarily because many women experience stigma and shame after they have been attacked and find it difficult to disclose and report their ordeal. The UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) believes that over 15% of women and girls in northern CAR have experienced gender and sexual based violence. OCHA believe attacks increased during pre coup and rebel clashes in 2006 and 2007. In May 2007, the CAR government requested the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the "many allegations of rape and other aspects of sexual violence perpetrated against hundreds of reported victims....during peak of violence in 2002/03". The ICC concluded that: "There were often aggravating aspects of cruelty such as rapes committed by multiple perpetrators in front of third persons, sometimes with relatives forced to participate."

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=77552>

Swaziland: Sexual abuse of girls and young women

IRIN report on recently published findings by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) which reveals one in three women from Swaziland has experienced some form of sexual abuse since childhood. The *National Survey of Violence Against Children and Young Women* interviewed women from rural and urban settings.

The statistics found 75% of perpetrators were known to their victims and only 44% of women interviewed declared their first sexual experience as 'freely willed and devoid of coercion'.

The study also raises several concerns regarding the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Swaziland currently has the world's highest HIV infection rate, with life expectancy dropping dramatically from 60 in the 1990s to the current life expectancy of 30 years. In addition, the last two years have witnessed 200,000 children (more than a fifth of the population in Swaziland) orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. Victor Ndlovu, a voluntary testing and counselling officer states "Rapists don't use condoms, and if a father or uncle are so inclined to rape a daughter or niece, or a boyfriend forces himself on his girlfriend, the danger of HIV transmission is rife." For Ndlovu "we are faced with a serious public health challenge, aside from the individual suffering incurred by the girls."

The report concludes that "The large numbers of sexual violence incidents happening in the home underscores the hidden nature of sexual violence and presents one of the largest challenges in preventing sexual violence in Swaziland." For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77685>

Mozambique: Child trafficking

Save the Children UK-Mozambique Office have reported that recent cases of child trafficking covered in the media in Mozambique are "just the tip of the iceberg." There have been 52 cases of suspected trafficking of women and children since January 2008. This has included the sexual enslavement of children (aged 14-16) who were trafficked to a brothel in Pretoria, South Africa. Chris McIvor, country director for Save the Children UK – Mozambique Office states that the "number of cases reported points

to a deeper and more pervasive problem throughout Southern Africa."

The issue of human trafficking is largely regarded to be on the increase, however accurate statistics are unavailable. A report by The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in 2003 estimated that "1000 Mozambican women and children were being trafficked to South Africa every year, mainly for sexual exploitation." McIvor believes that "higher levels of unemployment, young people looking for better lives, demands in some countries for illegal, cheap labour create the conditions that are ripe for trafficking." Moreover, Mandy Shongwe, manager of Amazing Grace, a children's home in South Africa, along the Mozambique border states: "The traffickers we have spoken to say they are taking advantage of the lack of legislation, a hole in the legal system; they know they will be charged with only part of what they are doing if they get caught." Currently in Mozambique law there is no legislation to prosecute alleged traffickers and consequently no suspected trafficker has been prosecuted and tried.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77575>

New Publications – International

'Picking up the Pieces: Women's Experiences of Urban Violence in Brazil'

Amnesty International

April 2008

AI Index Number: AMR 19/001/2008

This report is published as part of Amnesty International's 'stop violence against women' campaign and covers the harsh reality and specific needs many women face in Brazil. The research focuses on how living amid on-going police and

criminal violence impacts on women as they try to raise their children. Specifically the research addresses ways women deal with criminal violence with no state protection, the drugs trade and women's risks and experiences of violent attacks and intimidation.

The research involved interviewing women from six states between 2006-2007. The women included mothers who fled areas after criminal gangs 'took control', women who fought for justice after relatives were murdered and women who had got involved in the drugs trade.

The report includes chapters on: leading the fight for justice; women and crime; women and the criminal justice system; access to state services and good practice and the way ahead. The research concludes with a series of recommendations to address gender issues in policing, appropriate policies, implementation of services and on-going reviews.

For the '*Picking up the Pieces*' full research report see:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/001/2008/en>

'Perpetual Minors – Human Rights Abuses Stemming From Male Guardianship and Sex Segregation in Saudi Arabia'

**Human Rights Watch
April 2008
ISBN: 1-56432-307-2**

This report explores the segregated cultural norms and strict institutional codes for men and women within Saudi Arabia. The research analyses the impact of guardianship laws and highlights the difficulties and restrictions women face and the limited control they have over their lives, their well-being and decisions

regarding their children. In Saudi Arabia women must seek a male guardian's permission to work, to travel, to study or to marry. These restrictions contribute to Saudi Arabia having one of the lowest rates in the world for employing women. In addition, the male guardianship rights over adult women means women who experience violence are often unable to access any protection or support mechanisms. The research argues that whilst government have sought to limit male guardian's absolute rights over women, in practice, there is little evidence to suggest these measures are being implemented.

The research involved interviewing 109 women from a range of professional and socio-economic backgrounds from four areas in Saudi Arabia. The report explores the human rights violations that women experience as a result of the male guardianship. These include: the right to education, the right to employment, the right to health, the right to equality before law, the right to freedom of movement and equality in marriage. The report outlines various recommendations to the government of Saudi Arabia.

For the '*Perpetual Minors*' full research report see:

<http://hrw.org/reports/2008/saudiArabia0408/>

'Five Years On: No Justice for Sexual Violence in Darfur'

**Human Rights Watch
April 2008
ISBN: 1-56432-302-1**

This report examines the current situation for women and girls in Darfur, five years since the regional conflict escalated. The research maintains how sexual violence dominates life for many women and girls in displaced persons camps, towns and villages across the region. Women and

girls who have experienced sexual assaults, rape and violence currently have no access to redress and are fearful of reporting attacks.

The report argues that despite the National Action Plan of Combating Sexual Violence Against Women in (established in 2005), the measures have failed to address the root causes of sexual violence or reverse the climate of impunity for perpetrators. The report accuses the government of not making "serious efforts to deter or stop soldiers or militia forces from committing sexual violence". As a result, the research states "women and children continue to be brutally beaten and raped".

The research included interviewing 50 survivors of sexual violence in Darfur, government officials, law enforcement and legal personnel, rebels, aid workers and UN staff. The report provides a synopsis of current prevalence of sexual violence and patterns of abuse within Darfur and highlights some of the obstacles to justice women and girls face. The report concludes with recommendations for the government of Sudan, rebel forces, the UN Security Council and the UNAMID.

For the 'Five years on' full research report see:

<http://hrw.org/reports/2008/darfur0408/>

Maternity Pack Available

Maternity access and advocacy packs are available to community organisations

The Maternity Access and Advocacy Pack aims to improve access to maternity services for marginalised women, including refugees and asylum seekers. Many marginalised women do not obtain the antenatal and postnatal care they need to

protect their health and the health of their baby.

The Pack consists of three storyboards covering pregnancy, birth and becoming a parent. The illustrations show standard NHS maternity care. A supporting booklet contains further information about maternity care and issues such as interpreters, consent, choice, domestic abuse, mental health and other issues.

The Pack is designed for use with groups rather than on an individual basis. They will be beneficial to community organisations interested in maternity care issues. Therefore, Medact has 20,000 copies to give away free of charge to community organisations. Boxes of 40 copies are available on request to voluntary or statutory organisations who can distribute to community organisations in their area.

Medact is also running train-the-trainer workshops for individuals who will promote the resource amongst community groups in their area. The workshops are aimed at staff from PCTs, Local Authorities, Children's Centres and umbrella groups within the voluntary sector. They assume a reasonable understanding of the health system and are not suitable for individuals seeking to know more about maternity care. The objective is to train up individuals who can run sessions for local groups in their local area.

For more information, go to www.medact.org or contact us at maap@medact.org or 020 7324 4737.

women's asylum news

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