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Women's Asylum News

Women's Project at Asylum Aid

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Claiming Asylum on the Basis of Your Sexuality: The Views of Lesbians in the UK

Claire Bennett, a doctoral researcher at the University of Sussex, recently submitted her PhD thesis exploring how lesbian asylum seekers and refugees recall their experiences of the UK asylum process. This article for Women's Asylum News will outline some of the key findings from this piece of research along with some recommendations.

The research

The three year PhD research project interviewed lesbian asylum seekers living in London, Manchester, Wigan, Stoke-on-Trent and Leeds and explored their direct views and experiences of seeking protection. The qualitative study involved three repeat interviews with eleven lesbians who had all claimed asylum in the UK on the basis of their sexual orientation.

All women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence (some women had been imprisoned) in their country of origin because of their sexuality and all had claimed asylum in the last five years. Six of the women had gained refugee status and five of the women were at different stages of the appeals process (at the time of the interviews). The participants were from Jamaica, Uganda, The Gambia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and their ages ranged from their early twenties to their late fifties. The research examined women's experiences back home, their views of the asylum process and their personal reflections of being a lesbian asylum seeker in the UK.

The Findings:

Women's Homosexuality in their 'Home' Countries

All of the participants reported the difficulties they faced as a lesbian in their country of origin. Negative cultural codes, religious teachings and anti-homosexual laws often meant women experienced culturally permitted abuse, sexual violence, public beatings, imprisonment and torture without access to any protection or support. Alongside such traumatic incidents, the women spoke of their personal struggles in discovering their 'different' sexual identity. In this cultural context, women's description of being attracted to other women was deemed as something which could not be openly discussed or acknowledged. In countries where homosexuality is considered illegal, 'un-Godly', 'un-Islamic', 'evil' and 'morally deplorable', women devised deliberate strategies to avoid others knowing or even suspecting their sexual orientation. For some, this involved forming public heterosexual relationships or marrying men whilst continuing same sex relationships in private. All of the women reported that their sexuality was a source of deep isolation and personal distress, an aspect of their lives which needed to be concealed and as a consequence often became difficult to accept.

Seeking Asylum in the UK

The participants in this study used terms such as: "*difficult*", "*stressful*", "*dehumanising*", "*criminalising*" and "*traumatic*" to describe their experiences of seeking international protection in the UK. Different aspects of the asylum process emerged as problematic. For example, the lack of private space in the screening interview was considered to increase the tension and pressure associated with this initial interaction. Disclosing experiences of sexual violence during the "*sterile*" and "*unsympathetic*" substantive interview, together with the inability to express themselves freely seemingly added to personal difficulties. For the women detained, time spent in Yarl's Wood Immigration and Removal Centre made people feel that they were being physically removed from society and "*punished*" for their sexuality. The time taken for decisions to be reached was portrayed as "*heart-breaking*" and "*agonising*." In addition, having their individual accounts labelled by decision-makers as 'not-credible' left women in despair and for one woman, she felt her "*very existence had been denied*." This next section will however, focus on three key aspects which emerged from the research: 'talking about sexuality', 'evidencing sexuality' and 'social isolation.'

1) Talking about Sexuality During the Asylum Process

Talking openly about one's individual sexuality arose as bound within cultural codes of secrecy and shame. Given the levels of concealment and personal feelings of "*disgrace*" and

guilt associated with women's sexual orientation, the demand to frequently disclose this to strangers (including interpreters) was described as *"upsetting."* Conversations regarding how women had never previously discussed their sexuality in public and the personal difficulties associated with saying the words: *"I am a lesbian"* during their initial interactions with the UK Border Agency/ immigration judges/legal representatives arose. Many women discussed having negative thoughts towards their sexuality or fearing other people's negative judgements, as barriers to disclosing their same sex attractions. For others, their sexuality was perceived as a private and personal aspect of their life, which together with their experiences of sexual violence, was something which they felt deeply uncomfortable and suspicious of other people knowing, scrutinising and judging them on.

2) Evidencing Sexuality

The requirement to 'evidence sexuality' as demanded by the asylum process also emerged as challenging. Women's experiences of explicitly hiding and denying their sexual orientation in their home countries presented logistical difficulties. Added to this, the problems of getting others to become involved in their case was also difficult as some people *"did not want to publicly associate with a lesbian."* For example, one participant described how a former colleague rejected her request to verify her past experiences within Jamaica because the former colleague was *"disgusted"* at same sex relationships.

For the women in this study, the attitudes and types of questions directed at them by the UK Border Agency and immigration judges to prove their sexuality were described as *"very sad."* For example, in order to authenticate their sexuality, one participant was asked in her substantive interview whether she *"used sex toys"* and another woman was asked in court whether she *"read Oscar Wilde"* and *"which shows"* she watched. Significantly, this participant was later questioned on why *"she decided to be gay in a country [when she] knew it was illegal"* during the same court appearance. For other women their dress and behaviour seemed to affect the perceived legitimacy of their sexuality. For instance, accounts emerged that immigration judges told women that they *"did not look like a lesbian,"* that lesbians *"don't have children"* and that all lesbians enjoy the 'gay scene' and go on 'Pride' marches. These *"stereotypical views"* which the participants spoke of were deemed as particularly worrying especially for the Muslim participants who did not drink, did not go clubbing and had children. Combined, these experiences led to all women believing that the UK Border Agency and immigration judges had fixed views on sexuality and saw all lesbians as *"someone who is butchy, wears men's clothes and maybe with their hair shaved off."* For the women in this study, failure to conform to this outdated and *"inappropriate"* stereotype meant their sexuality was likely to be disbelieved and their asylum claim refused.

3) Social Isolation

The experience of being a lesbian asylum seeker in the UK was frequently described as both challenging and personally isolating. Like all asylum seekers, living in the UK with constant instability, fearing return and feeling that members of the public and press *"see you as scroungers and cheats"* made many women feel *"unwelcome"* and *"criminalised."* These troubling times however appeared to re-ignite women's previous experiences of social isolation and their painful memories of family rejection. Knowing that they were not just physically separated from their families but that their families did not want to see them again tormented many participants. In addition, finding comfort and support from other asylum

seekers or migrant communities was also difficult as they still faced discrimination and hostility from many people within these groups. For example, accounts emerged regarding feeling “*bullied*” by other asylum support groups once their sexuality was known. Moreover, feeling the need to deliberately avoid ‘Pakistani’, ‘Jamaican’ and ‘African’ communities for fears that these groups held homophobic views frequently arose. As a consequence, this study revealed how there were few avenues where lesbian women felt they could be themselves, feel supported, access appropriate information and feel safe whilst seeking asylum.

Recommendations

The recommendations for the research include:

- For the UK Border Agency, immigration judges and legal representatives working with lesbian asylum seekers to access further training on: the complexity and fluidity of sexuality (including avoiding the use of sexual stereotypes) and a greater appreciation of the difficulties associated with talking about sexuality.
- The provision of confidential space (especially during the screening interview) so women can disclose their sexuality without fear that other asylum seekers can overhear
- A greater awareness of the social isolation faced by lesbian asylum seekers and increased funding for the provision of more specialist support
- For further research on the legal interpretations and the decision-making process associated with claims based on a person’s sexuality
- For greater statistical information on the numbers of LGBT claims, the countries people arrive from, how many are given status, refused, placed on the detained fast track and returned.

Claire Bennett will be presenting papers on this research at:

The Lesbian Lives Conference, the University of Brighton, 15th February 2013

The British Sociological Association Annual Conference, The Grand Connaught Rooms, London, 5th April 2013

For further information please contact: C.M.Bennett@sussex.ac.uk

Legal Issues

CN v UK Domestic Servitude

CN v UK (No 4239/08), 13th November 2012, is the latest in a line of recent decisions from the ECHR on the issue of compulsory labour and slavery as prohibited by Article 4 of the ECHR. A(4)(1) states that 'No one shall be held in slavery or servitude', while A 4 (2) states 'No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour'. CN v UK should be placed

in the context of these earlier Court decisions.

In **Rantsev v Cyprus** (No 25965/04) 7th Jan 2010 ECHR, the Court stated that Article 4 may require a state to take measures to protect victims or potential victims from treatment amounting to a breach of A.4, in line with the 'positive obligation' with regards to breaches of Articles 2 & 3. This obligation on domestic authorities to investigate was confirmed in **CN & V v France** (No 67724/09) (11th October 2012).

The latter case also provided valuable guidance on what type of labour may amount to 'forced or compulsory' labour and what may amount to 'slavery'. Further, it addressed the key issue of the nature of threats used against victims to extract the labour and what types of threats may make the labour meet the test of 'compulsory labour'.

The Court considered that a person was made to carry out 'forced or compulsory labour', if the labour was carried out, *'contrary to the person's will'* and *'under threat of penalty'* and the person undertook *'a disproportionate amount of work, taking into account the nature and volume of the work in question, going beyond work that might reasonably be required in respect of family help or cohabitation'*.

Significantly, it considered that 'penalty' included not just physical abuse but also psychological threats such as threats to report the person to the immigration services or police and of sending them back to their home country. The Court acknowledged that this latter threat of return home may have a major impact on the victim if they have already suffered particularly traumatic experiences in their home country and hence have a deep-rooted fear of return. Indeed, when assessing whether a victim's circumstances may amount to a state of 'slavery' in breach of A.4 (2), the extent to which a victim viewed their circumstances as 'immutable' in that they had no option but to remain in servitude in order to remain in the host country rather than return home, was a key consideration.

It was against this background that the ECHR addressed itself to the case of **CN v UK**. CN had been a victim of sexual and physical violence in Nigeria. She came to the UK in 2002. She was assisted to leave Nigeria by a relative. However, on arrival, the relative took her passport and threatened that she would be sent back to Nigeria, where she feared further abuse, if she disclosed what had happened.

CN was set to work, as a personal carer via an Agency. Her wages were paid to her relative, with her agreement. However, she was made to work excessive hours, given only a few hours of leave per month, and was not given her wages as agreed by her relative. Further, her movements were strongly controlled by the relative to minimise external contact. CN's asylum claim had been dismissed and the police had concluded that there had been 'no evidence' that she had been held in domestic servitude.

At the time of the complaint to the ECHR, there was no specific criminal offence of forced labour in UK domestic law. This was not introduced until the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (effective from April 2010). The police investigation was heavily criticised by the ECHR as wholly inadequate, both in that it had been less than rigorous, the police having reached their conclusion without having interviewed CN's relative, and in that they had failed to understand the complexities of forced labour as distinct from trafficking. This latter failing inevitably impacted on the ability to conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint and hence on their effective discharge of their duty to investigate.

Helpfully, the Court commented that domestic servitude, '*...involves a complex set of dynamics, involving both overt and more subtle forms of coercion, to force compliance*'. A thorough investigation into complaints of such conduct therefore requires an understanding of the many subtle ways an individual can fall under the control of another' (para 80). It also stressed that, when assessing a potential breach, 'due weight' must be given to ILO 'indicators of forced labour'.

The Court further confirmed that there is a *low threshold* to be met before the duty to investigate a potential breach of A.4 arises. Essentially, this is that the complaint is not '*inherently implausible*' and hence gives rise to a 'credible suspicion' that a breach has or may occur.

Importantly, a complaint by the victim is not a prerequisite. The obligation to investigate arises once the matter has come to the attention of the authorities.

This decision, along with those of **Rantsev v Cyprus** and **CN & V v France**, is important in confirming

- (a) the positive obligation on the domestic authorities to conduct an investigation of suspected breaches of A.4,
- (b) that the threshold to trigger that duty is low,
- (c) that for the duty to be discharged the investigation must be thorough and requires a clear understanding on the part of the domestic authorities of the '*complex set of dynamics, involving both overt and more subtle forms of coercion, to force compliance*', and
- (d) that the adequacy of the domestic investigation is a matter which the Court is prepared to address.

Clearly, the quality of the domestic investigation will also have an important bearing on any protection claim under asylum or human rights law pursued by the victim. As such, immigration lawyers will need to remain alert to the quality of any police investigation.

We may be likely to see more decisions from the ECHR, and the domestic courts, on forced labour and slavery as immigration lawyers become more practised at spotting the signs, in the way that we have seen with the issue of trafficking over the past few years.

Sector Update

Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Asylum Support for Children and Young People

The Parliamentary Inquiry into asylum support for children and young people published its findings on 30th January. The report, based on the written and oral evidence submitted by over 200 individuals and organisations, reveals that the asylum support system is in urgent need of reform. Concerns were raised regarding the high level of destitution amongst children and families.

During the hearing, Refugee Action reported that they knew of instances where mothers were being forced into prostitution to help alleviate their poverty. One asylum seeker told the panel *"I would buy one meal which I would share with my son. My son is my priority, therefore I will provide his nutritional needs before my own and occasionally starving myself"*. The Inquiry concluded that current levels of support available for families are inadequate. Families on the lowest level of support are given their allowance on pre-paid cards which leaves them unable to catch a bus or buy food from local shops. The example of a mother who slept on the floor of a mosque with her six year old and three year old for five months, surviving on hand-outs until her application for asylum support was accepted, also illustrate some of the shortfalls. MP Sarah Teather, led the Inquiry and stated *"we were presented with evidence of the increased maternal and infant death rates amongst pregnant women in the asylum system, caused by poverty, problems accessing care and social isolation."*

The Inquiry found that there is no evidence to support the assumption that making the asylum process more difficult deters applicants or increases the number of families who return. A series of interventions to help improve the lives of families and children are recommended. The introduction of particular changes around the levels of financial assistance, housing and the right to work are deemed as priority. This includes calls to end section 4 and to introduce a cash-based system. Alongside this, greater monitoring to ensure the UK adheres to its international commitments form part of the conclusions.

For full Parliamentary Report please see:

http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/asylum_support_inquiry_report_final.pdf

National News

UKBA Continue To Use Force on Pregnant Detainees

The Guardian reveals that the UK Border Agency has rejected calls to stop using force on pregnant women and children during their removal. Although prison inspectors have said that force should never be used in the removal of pregnant women and children, the UKBA argue that without force, removals could be delayed. A report published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in October 2012 had criticised the use of force in the new child detention facility, Cedars, near Gatwick airport. Several examples which raise concern were highlighted in the report. For instance, a pregnant woman who had her wheelchair tipped up and was held by her feet by G4S staff was heavily criticised. This woman stated in a letter to the Guardian that: *"they were like animals. I was dragged through corridors, I was dragged like a dog."* Another incident emerged whereby a woman miscarried at the airport before she was put on the plane. Although it is understood that she experienced no physical force, she did report bleeding hours before she was taken the airport. The HMIP inspectors found that force had been used on six of the 39 families in the facility by the time of the inspection.

For full article see:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/jan/11/uk-border-agency-rejects-force?CMP=tw_t_gu

For HMIP report, see:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/immigration-removal-centre-inspections/cedars/cedars-2012.pdf>

Diary of a Refugee Woman

Women for Refugee Women have introduced a series of on-line blogs charting refugee women's experiences. The Diary of a refugee woman covers different women's circumstances and reflections during the month of January 2013. The difficulties of being able to buy warm clothes for children during the cold weather along with living with acute loneliness are covered in this month's blogs.

For further details please see:

<http://diaryofarefugeemother.wordpress.com/>

International News

Syria: Rape Being Used as Weapon of War

The International Rescue Committee report that rape is emerging as a *"significant and disturbing feature"* of the Syrian Civil War crisis. Although official statistics are impossible to collect, one female physician in Damascus alone has reported treating 2,000 women and girls who were raped in Syria. The report documents disturbing accounts of the extreme forms of sexualised violence women are being subjected to including having mice and rats inserted into their vaginas. Many women are raped by multiple perpetrators and in front of family members. Added to these torments, women fear reporting crimes committed against them due to the *"dishonour"* and *"stigma"* attached to sexual violence. The IRC state that there is a severe lack of medical and counselling services which also hinders women's recovery. Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East Director at Human Rights Watch states: *"Syrian security forces have used sexual violence... with complete impunity."* Human Rights Watch is urging the UN Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

For Further details please see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/war-rape-the-forgotten-pandemic-sweeping-syria-8460566.html>

Somalia: Woman Jailed for Reporting Rape

A 27 year old woman who reported being raped by security officials in Somalia has been jailed for 12 month for insulting a government state body. The court in Mogadishu stated the woman's claims were false as there was no medical evidence to support her accusations. A journalist who interviewed the woman about the incident has also been charged. Daniel Bekele, Africa Director for the Human Rights Watch stated *"The case was built on groundless charges and serious due-process violations, and should have been thrown out. The government should swiftly move to exonerate and release the defendants."* Human Rights Watch also believes the case acts as means to silence other women who may have experienced sexual violence by state security forces.

This outcome has sparked international outcry as the Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamudi is currently touring Europe. His election last year was viewed positively by the international community as the start of a new era for Somalia. Both the UK and the USA have criticised the court ruling and the US has described the decision as a “*litmus test*” for the future of the country. Both the woman and the journalist are expected to appeal the decision.

For further details please see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/05/somali-woman-jailed-claiming-raped?INTCMP=SRCH>

Egypt: Protestors Vulnerable to Sexual Violence

A shocking video has been released revealing the graphic gang rape of a woman who was attacked by a group of men in Tahir Square. This recent incident illustrates the growing vulnerability of women in public. In one week, 20 female protestors reported being sexually assaulted in Tahir Square.

In November 2012, Operation Sexual Harassment, a grass-roots organisation was set up to tackle the growing incidents of sexual violence against women. They argue that women are deliberately being targeted and subjected to sexually violent attacks as a means to discourage them from attending public rallies. Engy Ghozlan from Operation Sexual Harassment states: *“what is going on is political. Its main aim is the exclusion of women from a public space....In these recent assaults, the exact same thing keeps happening in exactly the same way. These attacks are organised.”*

The attacks also appear to receive little acknowledgement from the authorities and women’s accounts are often dismissed. This raises concerns that perpetrators can act with impunity and justice will not be served for the women.

One woman who was attacked in November 2012 has spoken about her experiences and recalled feeling helpless and fearful when a group of men separated her from her friends. The article includes her full testimony. Operation Sexual Harassment is encouraging more women to speak out about these incidents and not to be intimidated.

For further details please see:

<http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/conflict/middle-east-peace/pc-egypt/3689-cairo-rape-video-highlights-plight-of-women-protesters.html>

Kashmir: Sexual Violence on the Increase

Growing concerns are expressed over the increased numbers of women being exposed to sexual violence within the Kashmir region. Currently, as reflected throughout many regions in India, few cases reach court and a minority of sexualised crimes result in a conviction. Agencies, including Amnesty International India have called for more comprehensive regional policies and law reform to better protect the women of Kashmir. How women currently report crimes and are subsequently treated and examined by the police and medical staff is being questioned by campaigners. Women’s rights advocates call for practices such as the ‘two-

finger test' to be stopped in rape trials - they have no medical or forensic basis and are reported to further exacerbate the distress of women. In addition, calls for the attitudes of professionals dealing with crimes against women to change are being voiced. Women need to be seen as victims of crimes and not women who "invite violence" because of their perceived morality.

For further details see:

<http://womennewsnetwork.net/2013/01/23/kashmir-sexual-violence-justice-law/>

Swaziland: Fears Over Child Marriage Reforms

Despite being outlawed several months ago, traditional leaders in Swaziland have stated that child marriage is acceptable under customary law. In 2012, after the introduction of the Child Protection and Welfare Act, the Deputy Prime Minister Themba Masuku declared that any man who married a girl under the age of 18 faced arrest and prosecution. The Child Protection Welfare Act noted that girls who marry young face physical and psychological difficulties and their education usually stops once they are married. The statement supporting child marriage by the traditionalist Velebantfu Mtetwa, the country's top traditional leader has led to confusion regarding girls rights. Fears have materialised that only 'westernised' people will follow the Child Protection and Welfare Act. Maureen Littlejohn, communications officer for the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, an NGO that counsels survivors of gender-based and child violence states: "What is most disturbing is the fact that most of these 'marriages' are forced, with the young girls having little or no say in being married to a much older man."

For further details please see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97360/In-Swaziland-child-marriage-still-a-grey-area>

Bangladesh: 'Personal Laws' Do Not Protect Women From Violence

The interpretation of 'personal laws' within Bangladesh is criticised for keeping women in abusive marriages or enforcing destitution when marriages end. In Bangladesh, different laws exist for Christians, Muslims and Hindus and men are granted greater access to power and divorce as part of the 'personal laws'. Human Rights Watch recently interviewed 120 women and report that the 'personal laws' which cover marriage, separation and divorce are negatively affecting women. For example, the Hindu religion and laws in Bangladesh prohibit divorce. The testimony of one woman who wants a divorce and was hospitalised after she was tricked by her husband to drink acid is used to illustrate the unfair nature of the laws. The article does acknowledge recent progress in women's rights and the development of new laws within Bangladesh. Further amendments to ensure legal discrimination against women on issues around marriage, divorce and separation are however called for, including access to family court proceedings and social assistance for women.

For further details please see:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/26/laws-hurting-bangladesh-women-linger-books>

India: Violence and Stigma Still Attached To Rape

The gang rape and death of a woman in New Delhi has contributed to an increased acknowledgement of rape and sexual violence in India. However, placing the blame on women for their attacks continues to emerge. For example, state legislators in Rajasthan have called for girls to be banned from wearing skirts as part of their uniform. The Islamist group Jamaat-e-Islami Hind recommended a “*sober and dignified*” dress code for girls and the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat suggested that women and girls “*invite*” sexual assault through their clothing, appearance and conduct. Human Rights Watch have raised concerns that the continued blaming of women and girls reinforces the stigma associated with sexual violence and heightens the difficulties with recovery.

When reporting a rape, families are frequently pressured by police officials to drop the case to avoid the ‘shame’ they will experience within the community. A magazine in New Delhi has also reported that police officers are often hostile and unsympathetic to women who report such crimes.

The Human Rights Watch are encouraging an attitudinal shift regarding how rape cases are dealt with and reported. They recommend the Indian government establish protocols for sensitive screening for cases of sexual violence. In addition, front-line officials need to be trained on treating survivors of rape and sexual violence with dignity and not blame.

For full article see:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/08/stigma-and-blame-attached-rape-survivors-india>

New Publications

India: Submission to the Justice Verma Committee

Amnesty International January 2013

Amnesty International has published their recommendations for the Justice Verma Committee to support the reform of laws and criminal justice practices relating to crimes of sexual violence, including rape, in India. The recommendations focus upon legal reform and in particular, the need to address the impunity with which sexual violence against women and girls is committed. The briefing covers an overview of India’s obligations under International law; principles which should be considered when drafting legislation on violence against women; suggested amendments to current laws and suggestions for implementation.

For full briefing see:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/002/2013/en>

Be Careful What You Pay For: Awareness Raising on Trafficking in Persons

Washington University Global Studies Law Review, Vol. 11/No.2

Andreas Schloenhardt, Paris Astill-Torchia and Jarrod M. Jolly

Due to the difficulties in identifying victims and the illegal nature of trafficking there are no universally agreed statistics on the number of people trafficked.

This article examines international law and best practice guidelines relevant to raising awareness about international human trafficking. An analysis of past campaigns in Australia is also discussed. In particular the research argues that increasing public understanding regarding the causes, consequences and signs of trafficking is integral to prevent as well as promote the recognition of trafficking. It calls for anti-trafficking campaigns to focus on educating people and the risks of falling prey to criminal gangs and traffickers. In addition, particular emphasis is paid to help people recognise that they have been 'trafficked' and to ensure that they understand that they can be protected through law. Also, women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation should be aware of the health risks and receive support with unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Along with the victim-oriented approach, the research calls for clearer public accountability and a greater vigilance and ability to report suspected premises holding people who have been trafficked, including where women and girls may be held for sexual purposes.

For full article please see:

http://law.wustl.edu/WUGSLR/Issues/Volume11_2/schloenhardt.pdf

In The Face of War: Examining Sexual Vulnerabilities of Acholi Adolescent Girls Living in Displacement Camps in Conflict-Affected Northern Uganda

International Health and Human Rights
28th December 2012

Sheetal H Patel; Herbert Muyinda; Nelson K Sewankambo; Geoffrey Oyat; Stella Atim and Patricia M Spittal

This article discusses the findings from a ten month qualitative study with girls who were abducted and displaced in Northern Uganda. The research reveals how: the erosion of traditional Acholi mentoring and belief system, combined with the collapse livelihoods; being left unsupervised in camps; being away from family and an inappropriate access to sexual health, all contributed to the sexual vulnerability of girls. The article provides a useful literature review of the distinct difficulties faced by girls in refugee and displacement camps and their exposure to early sex, marriage and child-bearing. Specific policy and practical recommendations relevant to individuals and organisations working with refugee girls who have spent time in camps are covered.

For full article see: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1472-698X-12-38.pdf>

UK Events and Training

Maternity Action and Refugee Council Launch New Report

25th February 2013, 6-8pm, Westminster, London

“When maternity doesn’t matter: Dispersing pregnant women seeking asylum”

This event hosted by Sarah Teather MP, Richard Fuller MP, Fiona Mactaggart MP will launch a research report investigating the health impact of dispersal and relocation on pregnant women and new mothers seeking asylum.

For further information please contact: maxine.mcminn@refugeecouncil.org.uk

No Recourse/ Supporting Migrant Women Experiencing Domestic Violence

The Rights of Women

27th February 2013, Old Street, London

Meeting the needs of women from outside of the UK who are experiencing domestic violence is incredibly challenging, you have to be up-to-date in one of the most frequently changing areas of law, understand the duties of local authorities and the rights that the woman herself has to pursue justice in the criminal, family or immigration systems.

This one-day course will give you the skills and knowledge you need to confidently support a woman who has ‘no recourse to public funds’ or who is the national of the European Economic Area country with remaining in the UK and accessing financial support.

This course has been updated to incorporate recent crucial changes to the Immigration Rules and EEA Regulations, as well as changes to the way women can access financial support in the form of the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession.

1 Day - lunch and refreshments provided. Women only

Costs:

- Small voluntary sector organisation (income less than £250k) - £75
- Voluntary sector organisation (income between £250 and £500k) - £100
- All other organisations - £125

Booking:

For further information and booking form see: <http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/training.php>

or email: training@row.org.uk / Tel: 0207 251 6575

Charter of rights of women seeking asylum



Endorsements: 333

Google group membership: 168

Support for the Charter

When Asylum Aid initiated the Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum in June 2008, we knew that we could not start with a blank sheet of paper. So we asked a dozen organisations who had been working closely with us to be early endorsers. The Refugee Council, Scottish Refugee Council, Welsh Refugee Council, Amnesty International UK, Refugee Women's Association and Positively Women signed up immediately. By the time of the Parliamentary launch of the Charter in October 2008 we had over 100 supporters.

Ranging from large to small organisations, national to grassroots, the Charter list includes refugee organisations such as Refugee Action, Asylum Support Appeals Project and Why Refugee Women, human rights organisations such as Liberty, women's organisations such as Rights of Women and Maternity Action, unions, including the TUC, law firms and faith organisations.

When we were about to launch the Missed Out campaign in autumn 2012, there were 295 organisations endorsing the Charter. Realising that we needed to be able to say that we had "over 300" endorsers, we put out a call on the Charter Google Group asking for help in recruiting more Charter endorsers. Within 24 hours we had reached our target and within less than a week we received over a dozen new endorsements. We even had organisations that had already endorsed the Charter trying to endorse it again!

The Missed Out campaign has seen a lot of activity by endorsers and has also resulted in many new organisations supporting the Charter. Now 333 organisations have endorsed the Charter with the most recent addition being the British Red Cross. So for all of us working on issues affecting women seeking asylum (including women seeking asylum themselves) we have got clear evidence of the support and backing for our work.

For the full list of Charter endorsers please go to <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/data/files/Endorsements.pdf>

For more information on the Charter and the Missed Out campaign, please go to www.asylumaid.org.uk/charter

If your organisation would like to endorse the Charter, please send an email simply stating the name of your organisation to charter@asylumaid.org.uk

She was detained without charge

Nobody believed her story and no-one spoke up for her

Her family and friends didn't know where she was

Afraid...isolated...

She had no idea what would happen to her next

**And that was after she
sought asylum in the UK**

Our asylum system is now so tough that, all too often, this is how people seeking help are treated. And that can't be right.

We believe the system should be fair and just and that every asylum seeker should have legal help to make their case - only then can we say in good conscience 'let the law take its course'.

Asylum Aid is an independent, national charity that secures protection for people seeking refuge in the UK from persecution in their home countries.

We provide expert legal representation to asylum seekers and campaign for a fair and just asylum system. Founded in 1990, we have since helped 30,000 people to get a fair hearing. In 2009 85% of our clients were granted leave to stay in the UK when decisions were made on their claims for protection.

Please support us

Your donation will safeguard our independence and enable us to stand up for fair asylum rights without fear or favour.

You can make a donation via our website:
www.asylumaid.org.uk/pages/give_now.html
OR send it to us by post with this form:

Name:
Address:
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I want to make a one-off gift of £

(please make cheques payable to Asylum Aid)

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If you are a UK taxpayer, the value of your donation can increase by at least 25% under the Gift Aid scheme - at no additional cost to you! Please tick the box below to join the Gift Aid scheme.

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Please notify us if you are no longer eligible to Gift Aid your donations.

We will not sell or swap your personal details with any other organization. We would like to keep you informed about our work, campaigning and membership. If you do not wish to receive any information from Asylum Aid other than relating to your donation, please tick this box

www.asylumaid.org.uk

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Or, I want to make a regular gift to Asylum Aid by setting up a Standing Order

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each month/ quarter/ year (please circle) until further notice
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Sort code 08-03-31,
Account number: 0208 1102

Please return this form
in an envelope to:
Freepost RRJJ-BRGA-ZHAR,
Asylum Aid, Club Union House,
253-254 Upper Street,
London N1 1RU



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Produced by the Women's Project at Asylum Aid

Asylum Aid
Club Union House
253-254 Upper Street
London N1 1RY

Tel: 020 7354 9631
Fax: 020 7354 5620
Email: womenasylumnews@asylumaid.org.uk

www.asylumaid.org.uk

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